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NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

THE LAST OF MUSTUSHIMI

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NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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The Last of Mustushimi;

OR,

NICK CARTER'S NARROWEST ESCAPE.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE MISSING SENATOR.

Nick Carter entered his automobile in front of his own door and directed Danny, his chauffeur, to take him at once to the Hotel Mammoth, where he had an engagement to meet the "senator from the West"—the same senator who had been so closely associated with the detective during the prosecution of both his recent cases in Washington.*

The big motor-car sped along the avenue, keeping just within the law, for Danny was and is one of the most expert drivers in New York, and presently swung around the corner into the cross street that would take them directly to one of the hotel entrances, two blocks away.

But there, as it turned, something happened. One of the front tires exploded with a loud report, and the instant it did so, the wheel itself collapsed under the axle, and but for the fact that the machine was slowed down at the time—for that had been necessary in order to make the turn—and also had Danny been less an expert in his business, both he and the detective must have been thrown out against the curb, and probably severely injured—or killed.

As it was, the machine staggered across the street, almost rounded to, and very nearly capsized; but Nick Carter was only shaken up by the jolting, and not hurt at all.

"What happened, Danny?" asked Nick, as soon as he had pulled himself together.

"I don't know, sir. That was a good tire; almost new, and perfectly sound, and there was no reason why that axle should have——"

"Haven't you been a little careless in your examination of the machine, Danny?" interrupted the detective.

"No, sir. It is only last night that I examined every part of it thoroughly. Somebody has been tampering with——"

"Nonsense, Danny!"

The chauffeur shook his head but made no reply, and the detective continued.

"I'll walk on to the hotel," he said. "You can telephone to the garage and get the car taken care of. I won't need you any more to-day, anyway."

*The cases referred to are Nos. 562 and 563 of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY, and are entitled, respectively, "A White House Mystery," and "The Great Spy System."

"All right, sir," replied the chauffeur; and Nick hurried away, and left him there with the wrecked car.

When the detective arrived at the hotel he sent his card at once to the senator, but after a considerable wait, the boy who had taken it returned to say that the senator was not to be found anywhere.

"That is strange," mused the detective, and again he looked at the note he carried in his pocket, which had come to him while he was at the breakfast-table that morning, and which read as follows:

"DEAR CARTER: I have just arrived in town—8:30 P. M.—and I send this off at once so you will receive it, I think, early in the morning. I am at the Mammoth, as you see by the heading, and I will appreciate it if you can manage to come over here to see me as soon as possible in the morning. I will wait in for you till ten o'clock, and if you have not appeared by that time, I will go around to your house, on the belief that you would rather receive me in your own quarters than to come here. The matter that I wish to discuss with you is of the gravest importance, so I hope that nothing will interfere with an early interview. Faithfully yours,

"_____ _____."

The detective did not repeat the name aloud for obvious reasons. The senator's name must not appear here, and it is sufficient for the purposes of our story that we refer to him merely as the "senator" and as "the senator from the West."

He looked at his watch after he returned the letter to his pocket, and saw that it was exactly nine o'clock. Then he smiled, lighted a cigar, and dropped into one of the chairs near the office desk, to wait, for it occurred to him that the senator might have remembered something he wished to attend to that morning and had stepped out to do so, in the belief that the detective would not show up till about the limit of the time set, ten o'clock.

He remained there, keeping an eye upon all who entered or left the building, until the clock marked a quarter to ten; then he crossed to the desk and asked that his card be sent to the senator's room again.

Fifteen minutes later, the boy who had taken it, returned with the same report he had brought the first time; and Nick was puzzled.

"Have you called out his name around the hotel corridors?" he inquired of the boy.

"Yes, sir. In the café and all the dining-rooms everywhere."

"Did you go to his room yourself?"

"No, sir. Word is always sent up to the office on the floor where the room is located. But it was reported that he was not in."

"Thank you. That will do for the present. Just run around the corridors once more, and call his name. When you have done that, return here."

Nick stepped to the desk, when the boy had gone, and he said to the clerk, whom he knew:

"Sammy, do you know the senator by sight?"

"Yes; very well."

"Have you seen him this morning?"

"No."

"I don't suppose you were on duty when he arrived last night, were you?"

"Yes. I happened to be. I worked late last night to help out here. Why?"

"You saw him then, eh?"

"Yes. I registered him. He didn't want his name on the regular desk register. That often happens, you know, with public men who don't care to have the newspapers know when they arrive."

"Was any one with him?"

"No, he was alone. I gave him 1035-A; parlor, bedroom, and bath; best quarters on that floor. I think it was about half-past eight, or thereabouts."

"Did he go out last evening, do you know?"

"I haven't an idea. I know that at the time he went directly to his room. I didn't see him again after that."

"What time did you come on duty this morning?"

"At eight."

"And he hasn't been down?"

"I can't say as to that. I only know that I have not seen him."

"He wrote a letter to me last night in which he made an appointment for me to come here this morning, and stated that he would wait in for me till ten. It is now ten, and I have been here since nine. Are you too busy to leave the desk for a few minutes, Sammy?"

"I guess I could do it all right. Why?"

"I want you to come up-stairs to his room with me."

"Eh? What for? You don't think that anything has happened to him, do you?"

"I don't know. He isn't the sort of man who has 'things' happen to him; but all the same, he *is* the sort of man who keeps to his engagements, and I confess that I feel puzzled, as well as worried."

"All right. Wait just a minute, Nick, until I get one of the duplicate keys and ask Ben Thompson to take my place for a few minutes. I'll be with you."

The detective resumed his chair and waited until Sammy made his appearance outside the desk, and then they went to the elevator together; and behind them came the chief of the corps of hotel detectives employed at the Mammoth.

"I thought it would be a good idea to have Grafton along with us," explained Sammy. "I told him to trail along after us. Hope you don't mind, Nick?"

"No."

"You know if anything *is* the matter, it is always well to have Grafton, or one of the regular force on hand—that is, it is easier for one of us clerks. It saves us ma-

king explanations, and all that. That is what Grafton and his men are here for."

"Precisely."

"I told him to keep in the background, as if he didn't know us at all, unless we decided to enter the room, in the event of the absence of the senator."

"I see."

"If we do that, I'll just stand back and let him go into the room with you; see? If there is a murder, or suicide, or——"

"Great Scott, Sammy, I'm not thinking of anything as serious as all that."

"I suppose not; but if you were a clerk in a big hotel like this one, you would always be thinking of things like that when matters don't move on greased wheels, like clockwork."

When they stepped from the elevator at the tenth floor, Sammy waited until Grafton put in an appearance, and then the three passed through the hall together; and while Nick rapped upon the senator's door, Grafton and Sammy moved on along the corridor.

But when the detective received no response to his summons, they returned to him, and Sammy quietly passed the duplicate key to Nick and walked away again, while Grafton remained to enter the room with Nick Carter.

The door opened readily enough, of course, and the two men entered, for the door gave upon the parlor of the suite.

The senator's Gladstone bag rested upon one of the chairs in that room. It had been opened, and several things that had been taken from it were strewn upon the chair beside it; but it had only the appearance as if the senator had been searching for something inside it, and had laid other things aside while doing so. There was no apparent confusion.

Nick cast an uneasy glance toward Grafton, who remained, solemn-faced, beside him, and then stepped quickly to the bedroom door.

Here, in the bedroom, nothing had been disturbed—that is, there had not been more disturbance than would be natural on the arrival of a guest in the rooms; but it was evident that the bed had not been occupied the preceding night.

A large leather case was spread open upon the bed; doubtless it was exactly in the position in which the senator had placed it when it was delivered to his room after his arrival. A few things had been removed, and were strewn upon the bed beside it. A comb and brush, a soiled collar and cuffs were on the dresser; a towel was thrown across the back of a chair beside the dresser; a whisk-broom was on the floor, where the senator had evidently dropped it, carelessly. That was all.

They passed into the bathroom, and here a few of the senator's toilet articles—tooth-brush, powder, etc.—were in evidence; a used towel had been thrown on the floor. That was all.

"What do you think about it, Grafton?" asked Nick.

"Looks to me as if he came up here last night, when he arrived, washed up, changed his linen, spruced himself up a bit, and then went out again—and didn't return," was the reply.

"That is exactly the way it appears to me," said Nick; and Grafton shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"It's the old story," he said. "He probably went out and made 'a night of it,' and hasn't shown up yet this morning. Lots of 'em do that, you know, without really meaning to; eh?"

"Yes," said Nick slowly, "but the senator isn't that sort, Grafton."

CHAPTER II.

EVIDENCES OF A PLOT.

After an hour spent in diligent inquiry, Nick Carter was unable to find a single person in that hotel who appeared to have seen the senator after half-past eight o'clock the preceding evening.

In fact, tracing the senator's every movement as best he could, from the moment of his known arrival, the only information that could be obtained concerning him was that he had been conducted to his room in the usual manner, and that presently he had appeared on the office floor again, where the hall-boy, who had taken him to his room, remembered seeing him as he seated himself at one of the writing-desks, where he spent ten or fifteen minutes writing. Probably this was the letter Nick Carter had received from him. The hall-boy did not see him when he left the writing-desk and did not know in which direction he had gone; he only remembered noticing the senator's absence from it ten or fifteen minutes after he had seated himself there.

In the café and bar he was not known by name, and no information was obtainable, and it was not even certain that he had dined in the hotel.

It was certain that he had not occupied his room during the night, for the big leather suit-case was upon the bed as he had left it there, and the chambermaid who had that room in her care assured the detective that it had not been occupied.

Nick knew the senator to be a man of very methodical habits. He had passed the age of roistering about the city at night, and it is doubtful if he ever had that inclination, at least, since he was a very young man.

There was absolutely no trace of him to be discovered, and the detective, although distinctly uneasy concerning his friend, was still hopeful that he might have gone out in the evening and been detained by some accident or other, and thus prevented from returning to the hotel

and his room in order to keep the appointment he had made with the detective by letter.

Nick knew that the senator was a man well able to take care of himself under any circumstances or conditions that might arise. He was a typical Western man. Born and raised on the frontier, utterly devoid of fear, muscular, alert, and, moreover, it was his habit, and had been since boyhood, always to go armed.

After writing a note which he left in the hotel office for the senator should he return, the detective made his way slowly back again to his own house, pondering upon the rather strange incident; and the only possible satisfactory explanation that he could think of was that the senator had gone somewhere in an automobile which had broken down, or that he had utilized the evening to call upon some one of his city friends who had detained and kept him through the morning beyond the time of his appointment.

Nick Carter pursued almost the same course in returning home that he had followed in going to the hotel in the automobile with Danny, and when he arrived at the spot where they had broken down, he found that his chauffeur had already removed the wrecked machine and that no trace of the accident was left there.

He paused for a moment on the curb near where the accident had happened, smiling rather dubiously as he thought about it, for now he recalled Danny's interrupted insinuation that the machine had been tampered with.

But he dismissed the idea, almost as soon as it came to him, as absurd, although taken in conjunction with the disappearance of the senator, provided he should not show up within a few hours, the happening of the accident might have a new significance.

He turned the corner into the avenue and started at a rapid walk along the west side of it toward his home and presently came to a place where building operations were going on and where he had either to pass several paces across a platform along the building or to go outside and around it in order to pass.

He chose the latter course and had proceeded to or three steps in this direction when he remembered that he had to cross the avenue anyhow in order to get to his own house, and so instead of following along the street close to the edge of the platform, he continued on his way obliquely toward the other side.

This sudden decision, followed by the act on his part, probably saved his life, for he had not taken three steps more when a heavy bit of stone cornice crashed into the street and tore a hole in the pavement exactly where he would have been had he continued on his original way.

The detective made a quick leap aside, just as any one would have done under just such circumstances, and then turned and looked quickly around him and up toward the top of the building just as half a dozen workmen came rushing toward him, and he heard shouts on every side from people who believed that he had been injured; but although the huge stone had fallen very close to him, he had escaped it entirely so that not even a fragment of the torn pavement was thrown against him.

It did not occur to him at the instant that this incident could be anything more than a mere accident, and with a shrug of his shoulders had gone on again and had walked two blocks onward when it occurred to him that that was the second time that morning when his life had been in danger.

He stopped abruptly in the street then and passed one hand meditatively across his brow, wondering in the meanwhile if there could be anything more than mere coincidence in the happening of these events—the wrecking of the automobile, the mysterious disappearance of the senator, and the crashing of the rock into the street, almost upon him.

Convinced that it would be well to make a few inquiries, he retraced his steps to the building and asked one of the workmen to call the man to him who was in charge, and a tall, raw-boned Irishman presently made his appearance, exclaiming, as he did so:

"You came back to ask me about that stone fallin' into the street, I suppose, Mr. Carter."

"Ah!" said Nick, "so you know who I am."

"Yes, sir, one of the men told me after you went on, just a minute ago."

"Which man was it?" asked Nick.

"Sure, sir, he's a new man that I took on the job last night; that is, I engaged him last night, and he went to work for me this mornin' for the first time."

"Where is he?"

"Inside the buildin', sir."

"I'll ask you to send for him in a moment."

"All right, Mr. Carter, whenever you please."

"Whose fault was it that that stone fell when it did?"

"It was his, sir, that same man."

"Do you know how it happened?"

"Faith, he didn't know that himself; at least, he couldn't quite tell me."

"What did he tell you about it?"

"Well, it was this way, sir; the derrick was hoisting the stone into place and it was Delano's—that's his name—work to receive it at the top of the wall, where, with another man to help him, he had to adjust it in place. The way that he explained it was that when they cast off the hook and the chain from the stone, the chain caught it again when the derrick swung out and dragged the stone from the building. It's a mercy that it didn't kill you."

"I think it is," replied the detective dryly. "Now, I will thank you to send for Delano."

The Irishman raised his voice and called loudly to some one within the building and ordered that Delano

be sent to him at once, but it was only a moment later when a voice from higher up in the building shouted:

"Delano's not here, sir. He's gone."

"Gone!" exclaimed the Irishman. "What's ailin' you, boy? Of course he's there somewhere. Look around for him; tell him I want him, an' he's to come mighty quick!"

"He's not here, sir," came the reply a moment later, "he's gone."

"Gone where?" shouted the foreman.

"We don't know that," came the answer. "He went away right after he was talkin' with you down there in the street after the stone fell."

The detective, who was listening, shrugged his shoulders and smiled, for this seemed to him to be a confirmation of his fears, but he said nothing about them to the foreman, and thanking him for his attention, he turned away and proceeded, without again stopping, to his own home.

But Nick Carter had plenty of food for thought now. There was the automobile that Danny believed to have been tampered with, and now came the tumbling of the rock into the street, evidently purposely dropped there by a man who had sought and obtained a job at working on the building for the purpose of injuring Nick Carter if he could do so when the latter was passing.

"But," the detective argued to himself, "if I am to presuppose that this man, Delano, sought and obtained that employment for this distinct purpose and that he only asked for the job last night, he must have had previous knowledge of the senator's intention to send for me, to have figured it out that I would pass along this way during the forenoon of to-day. That all seems preposterous to me, for how could that man, or the people who employed him, have known that the senator would write me a note asking me to come to him this morning instead of coming to me himself?"

But as if in reply to this question that he asked himself, came the recollection of the disappearance of the senator, and that argued that the assassin at the top of the new building—if he were one, indeed—might have been there to "get" either one of the two men, the senator or the detective.

The detective thought all this out while he was approaching the house where he lived, and now as he ascended the front steps toward the door, he recalled the contents of the senator's note in which the latter said he wished to consult Nick Carter upon matters of grave importance, and he decided then and there that there could be no doubt that the second "accident" in which he had figured that morning, and the fact of the senator's disappearance from the hotel, were all of the same character and were the results of careful calculation on the part of others.

Then he produced his latch-key and opened the door of his house to enter it, but as he did so there was a loud explosion, almost in his face, so that he started back violently, and he knew at once that a bullet from a cartridge had barely missed striking him in the head.

CHAPTER III.

MATTERS OF GRAVEST IMPORTANCE.

Joseph, who was inside the house at the far end of the hall, heard the sound of the shot and came running forward to ascertain the cause, and he was followed by Chick and Patsy, both of whom had been seated in the library.

It was instantly apparent to all of them what had happened.

A small instrument not more than two inches in length, bored out like the barrel of a pistol, had been screwed fast to the door over against the outer edge of it in such a manner that the door upon being opened would release a spring and send a regular cartridge-hammer forcibly against the percussion in a rim-fire .22-caliber cartridge that the instrument contained. The thing was there yet, and the cartridge shell was inside.

Nick removed the dangerous little instrument from the casing of the door and examined it critically, and then he said to Chick with a smile:

"Chick, if it weren't my habit to push a door open considerably in front of me before I passed through, I would have got that little .22 bullet in my brain that time."

"You certainly would," replied the assistant.

"Has Danny come back?" asked Nick.

"No, he has not been here since he took you away this morning."

"Well, Chick, that makes the third time that my life has been attempted since I left the house, and the senator, who sent for me, disappeared from the hotel very soon after he wrote the letter last night, leaving no trace behind him."

"What is it all about?" asked Chick, who had followed his chief into the library.

"That is rather difficult to answer, lad. The only possible explanation to be given at the moment is that it is some more of the work of Mustushimi or the followers of Mustushimi."

"I thought," said Chick, "that Mustushimi, himself, was accounted for. He was turned over, was he not, to the Japanese ambassador and sent back to Japan?"

"Yes. That was my information. But we must not forget, Chick, that he had established a very complete and thorough organization of his spy system in this country; and also we must not forget that although I routed the thing out completely in Washington and have driven out the branches in other cities as well, the organization still exists, while now, as an organization, it realizes that

its first duty, in order to be successful in the future, will be to get rid of me."

"I guess that's so, all right," said Patsy, who had followed them into the library.

"There has no telephone message or message of any sort come to the house for me from the senator since I went out?"

"Nothing," replied Chick.

"Then it's a safe proposition, considering what has occurred this morning, that our friend the senator is in the hands of the enemy."

"It is too bad," remarked Chick, "that he didn't come directly to see you when he arrived here in the city last night."

"It would be quite as logical," replied Nick, smiling, "to say it is too bad that Mustushimi and his organization ever existed at all. The point is, Chick, that we are confronted with a condition which we must meet."

"I don't see how you are going to meet it when you don't even know what it's about," said Patsy, with his hands deeply thrust into his pockets. "Couldn't you get any trace of the senator at all, chief?"

"None at all," replied the detective. "All I know is that he arrived at the hotel soon after eight o'clock last evening and was taken to his room. His baggage was sent to it; that he opened his baggage and made some changes in his attire, and that afterward he descended again to the office of the hotel where he wrote a letter. From that moment he has disappeared."

"What are we going to do about it?" asked Patsy, who always regards in the collective sense anything that concerns his chief.

"There is nothing to do, Patsy, save to wait. It is possible, of course, that the senator has not been molested, and that I will hear from him or see him very soon. As a matter of fact, it is absurd to suppose that he has been molested at all, but we all know something about the resourcefulness of the Mustushimi crowd, and if we have those fellows to thank for the incidents of this morning, then I will be satisfied to assume that the senator is in trouble."

There were two or three minutes of silence after that which was presently broken by Patsy, who asked rather irrelevantly:

"I say, chief, do you remember that chap in Washington whom I smashed under the ear and pitched into a cab where Danny was waiting for him?"

"Yes," said Nick; "Dumont."

"He was the second in command of Mustushimi's spies, wasn't he?"

"Yes."

"And if I'm not mistaken, nothing was done with him. He was allowed to go free, wasn't he?"

"He was, Patsy. They were all allowed to go free. It was not thought best at the time to make too much noise about the affair, since there was a possibility that it might assume international importance."

"I see," said Patsy. "Well, chief, you can bank on it if Mustushimi is really out of the country and has really gone back to Japan, which I am inclined to doubt, that the fellow, Dumont, is the 'nigger in the fence' in this particular case, to-day."

"It's not unlikely, Patsy," rejoined his chief, "although I don't see just exactly how we are benefited by arriving at that conclusion."

"If you will let me make a suggestion, chief, I think I have got one."

"Go ahead, Patsy."

"It may be time wasted, because it will take me some little time to begin where I want to begin and follow the trail; but if you will let me skip over to Washington, and, beginning at that end, follow the track of Dumont, it wouldn't surprise me a bit if I traced him to our front door where that burglar-alarm pistol was screwed into it."

"It's a good idea, Patsy," said the detective. "You may start immediately. Report here to the house by telephone when you have any information that I should know."

Patsy did not wait for further orders, but left the room at once, and was presently hurrying toward the Pennsylvania station to take the train for Washington.

"Now, Chick," said the detective, as soon as they were alone together, "I am going to send you to the Hotel Mammoth. You may go with open orders. Do what you can to find some trace of the senator or what became of him, and report back here some time this evening. You have a free hand, Chick, to act just as you please."

When Chick had departed also, the detective seated himself in his favorite chair in the corner of the room and gave himself up to the task of endeavoring to recall to mind every conversation he had held with the senator from the West in the past, hoping thereby that he would remember names that the senator might have used in referring to acquaintances in the city of New York. Try as he might, the only name which the detective could recall, that the senator had used concerning acquaintances in New York, was that of a firm of brokers in lower Broadway, Studley & Hall.

He remembered this firm as one that had done considerable business for the senator, and it occurred to him that more than likely the statesman might have communicated with them concerning his intention to visit the city. The idea had no sooner taken shape in his mind that he started at once to visit their office below Wall Street, but as he reached the outer door of his house, he came face to face with Danny, who was returning from the garage to which he had taken the wrecked Peerless.

"Ah, Danny," he said, "I am glad you have got back.

I am in a hurry, but I want to ask you a few questions about that accident."

"It was no accident, sir," replied Danny, scowling; "it was design, pure and simple; that's what it was."

And thereupon, with great volubility, he entered at once into a technical description to the detective of the methods that had been employed by some unknown person to wreck the car the moment it should attain any considerable speed.

"The only wonder is," he concluded, "that it held together as long as it did, and I want to tell you right now, Mr. Carter, that if the tire had exploded and the wheel twisted off five minutes sooner than it did while we were speeding up the avenue, she would have turned turtle on us and somebody would have been hurt."

"I haven't a doubt of it, Danny," replied the detective, "though it may relieve your mind if I tell you that I have discovered enough since then to know that it was done by people who were trying to injure me; and now I want you to make arrangements so that I can have another machine to use until mine is repaired."

"I have already done that," said Danny.

"Very well, you may remain in the house, then, until I return or telephone to you. I am going down-town now."

The detective hastened to the subway and walked into the office of Studley & Hall a little later, where he sent his card in to the head of the firm and was received at once.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Carter," said Studley, as he shook hands with the detective. "Your name has been mentioned to us quite frequently by the senator."

"Yes," said Nick, "we are great friends. It is concerning him that I have called upon you, Mr. Studley."

"Indeed?"

"Did you happen to know that the senator was in the city?"

"I knew that he was expected here. I was not aware that he had arrived."

"He came last night," said Nick.

"Did he? Our letter said he would be here in a few days and would communicate with us when he did arrive; further than that we have no information about him."

"He arrived here shortly after eight o'clock and went to the Hotel Mammoth," replied the detective. "He went to his room and changed his collar, then returned to the office floor, where he wrote a letter—and disappeared."

"Disappeared! What do you mean?"

"I mean just what I said; he disappeared."

"But, my dear Mr. Carter, it isn't likely that he walked out of the hotel into nothingness, is it? Men don't disappear in New York in that way, nowadays."

"Oh, yes, they do, Mr. Studley. They do every day. Disappearances are more common now than ever. But the fact is, I don't know whether he walked out of the hotel or not. I can find no trace of him at all after he seated himself at a desk to write his letter to me which I received this morning at the breakfast-table."

"But," expostulated the broker, "you are the great Nick Carter; a mere disappearance of that sort ought to be child's play to you."

"I'm quite aware of that," laughed Nick, "but all the same it is very mysterious. I think that I would like to ask you some questions if you were willing to answer them."

"Certainly, I will answer any questions you would like to ask, although, as I said before, we have no information about the senator's movements or plans other than that he expected to be here within a few days when we last heard from him."

"In the letter that he wrote to me," said the detective, "he mentioned that he wished to discuss with me matters of the greatest importance. I want to ask you if you know anything about what that referred to?"

CHAPTER IV.

NICK CARTER PLANS A SURPRISE.

Broker Studley, who was a typical, smooth-shaven, iron-faced Wall Street financier, pursed his lips and put the tips of his fingers together while he thought deeply for a moment, and then he replied:

"I am sure, Mr. Carter, I have not the slightest idea what he might have referred to."

"Was there anything else in the letter he wrote you than the mere announcement of his expected arrival here?"

"Nothing at all. I can show you the letter if you care to see it."

"If you would be so good, I would like to look at it."

The broker rang a bell and ordered a certain file brought to him, from which presently he extracted a letter which Nick read to himself as follows:

"I am going to New York in a few days on business of importance, not associated with anything in your line, but I will notify you of my arrival there and will see you before I leave the city."

That was all. It was signed with the senator's well-known signature, and afforded no clue whatever to the real business which had brought the senator to the city.

"Can you give me the names of any other friends than yourselves whom the senator visits in this city?" the detective asked after a moment.

"No," said the broker, shaking his head. "I really think, Mr. Carter, that he has no personal friends here. Of course he has many acquaintances among the politicians and office-holders and also in this Wall Street set

of ours, but they are all of them merely acquaintances, and none of them belong in the category of friends. I think my house is the only one he ever visits where he sees any home life in the city."

The detective thanked the broker for his courtesy and rose to depart, but just as he did so, one of the clerks entered the room, bringing a telegram which he handed to Mr. Studley, and the detective, never thinking that the contents might concern him, was leaving the room when Studley uttered a sharp exclamation and called to him to wait.

"Here you are, Mr. Carter," he said. "Here is an answer to all your questions;" and he stepped forward and passed the telegram over to the detective.

It read:

"Will arrive in New York the day after to-morrow;" and it was signed with the senator's name.

The broker, in the meantime, was rubbing his hands and smiling, well pleased by the turn events had taken, and now he exclaimed:

"I guess you must have been mistaken about that disappearance, Mr. Carter."

"Do you?" said Nick. "Why?"

"That telegram says, as plainly as anything can, that the senator is still in Washington."

"Oh, no, it doesn't; it says something entirely different from that."

"The telegram is from Washington, isn't it?"

"Apparently it is."

"And signed by the senator, isn't it?"

"His name is appended to it, but I don't think that he ever sent it. Mr. Studley, this is proof to me that there is a plot against him, and that it is working at both ends. I don't see why those who are intriguing should have thought it necessary to send this wire to you unless they are informed that he intended to come here to see you, and apprehend lest his failure to do so would create inquiry. But even in that case, they must know that I would already have heard of his arrival; however, if I may use your telephone and communicate with Washington, we can soon settle all that question."

"Certainly; there it is; make use of it."

Nick was familiar with the senator's telephone number in Washington, and was quite certain that the senator's secretary would be there to reply, so it was not long before the connection was established and the secretary's voice, perfectly intelligible to the detective, informed him that the senator had indeed left Washington the preceding day, but expected to arrive in New York in the evening.

"It is possible," said the detective as he started to leave the office the second time, "that nothing has happened that will not be easily explained when the senator appears, but there is no doubt that he arrived here last evening and has since disappeared. Whether he went somewhere voluntarily, and has been detained, or has met with violence of some kind, we cannot decide; but if the former is the case, we shall very soon hear from him, and you will do me a favor, Mr. Studley, if you will communicate any information you may receive so that I may get it at once."

"I certainly will," was the reply.

The detective returned up-town by way of the elevated road, and when he left it, he walked directly to the Hotel Mammoth, where he again made inquiries at the desk, but only to find that nothing had been heard from the senator, nor concerning him, since he was last there.

In wandering through the corridor, undecided what to do, he encountered Chick, who had no report whatever to make, and it was then that a thought came to the detective which he regarded as a happy one. He left Chick abruptly and hurried to his own home, and there in his study he performed that miracle of transformation that he had accomplished once before since his acquaintance with the senator, by making himself up so exactly like the statesman that the most intimate acquaintance would have been deceived.*

It is not necessary to go into details about this transformation of his own person into a perfect semblance and resemblance to the senator, it being sufficient to say that in the beginning of their acquaintance Nick had succeeded in passing himself off as the senator with great satisfaction to himself, and to the utter dismay of others; and now he only had to reproduce what he had accomplished then, and therefore did it.

Having completed the make-up to his entire satisfaction, he telephoned to the stables for a closed coupé in which he was driven at once to the Hotel Mammoth, and he entered there, walking in with a perfect reproduction of the senator's gait.

Chick was almost the first person whom Nick noticed when he entered the hotel, and he smiled when he saw his assistant start forward quickly to greet him.

Here was a chance to test his disguise to the utmost, for if any one would see through it, Chick surely would.

"How are you, senator?" exclaimed Chick, with extreme cordiality, extending his hand. "We have been looking everywhere for you and wondering what had become of you."

Nick did not reply nor did he accept Chick's hand, but he remained staring coldly into the eyes of his assistant until Chick's own eyes widened and his pupils dilated in astonishment; then suddenly, he leaned forward closer to Nick and said in a low tone that was almost a whisper:

"By Jove, Nick, it's great! If you hadn't looked at me in the way you did, you would have fooled me, sure."

"All right," said Nick, chuckling. "That's all I wanted to know. Wait here for me."

He walked on to the desk then, where the clerk, Sam-

*See NICK CARTER WEEKLY, No. 562.

my, had just come on duty, and he leaned over and said to him:

"Any messages or cards for me, Mr. Clerk?"

"Ah, senator!" exclaimed the clerk. "So glad to see you back again; we were really quite worried about you, you know. Yes, sir, here's a note that was left for you this morning, and," he leaned forward and whispered mysteriously: "Nick Carter, the detective, is looking for you very anxiously."

"Nick Carter, eh?" said the imitation senator. "What does he want?"

"Well, sir, he said that you had made an appointment with him for this morning. I think he said it was for nine o'clock. I know that he waited here until after ten, and I think he has been back once or twice since."

"Well," said Nick, still in perfect imitation of the senator's voice and manner, "that's all right. I just want to say to you that I wish you'd pass the word to the other clerks that I'm not going out of the hotel again without leaving word at the desk; and if anybody inquires for me, I want to be informed."

"Why, certainly, sir. We always notify the guests when——"

"Now, Mr. Clerk, don't be too sure of that. You didn't know that I was out of the hotel when you tried to find me this morning."

"But, senator, you will pardon me, I'm sure. You didn't sleep in your room last night, did you?"

"I don't know that it's anybody's business where I slept last night," replied the supposed senator with evident testiness. "You would do me a favor if you would pay attention to the directions I have just given you."

"I certainly will, sir, and I hope you will pardon——"

"Oh, that's all right, clerk. I'll repeat those directions once more; I am not going to leave the hotel unless I announce the fact at the desk, first, and if any one should want me, it is your place to have me found."

He turned away then, having accomplished his purpose, which was to give the emphatic impression at the desk that he was really the senator, and that he was there in the hotel ready to be seen at any moment if any one should call upon him.

The reader may not thoroughly understand his purpose in pursuing the course that he did, but Nick knew that the first principle in governing and controlling a spy system is never to let the left hand know what the right hand does.

Where a spy system is thoroughly organized, the spies themselves are almost always entirely unknown to one another.

If, in the case of the disappearance of the senator, this rule had been followed among the men who were working against the statesman and Nick Carter, it was more than likely that one or more of them, if there should be many, in passing through the hotel and discovering the senator there, would suppose that the original plan had failed and would therefore make some move, or to put it more emphatically, some "break" by which they would betray themselves.

This was what Nick Carter hoped for.

This was why he had appeared to be short and testy with the clerk. This was why he now returned to Chick and said to him:

"I want you to go out now, Chick, and put yourself into some disguise; I don't care what. As soon as you have done that, return here and keep as close to me as you can without attracting observation. I want you to keep your eyes peeled for every one who looks at me twice, and if some one of the members of that spy system doesn't betray himself to us before midnight tonight, I shall feel greatly disappointed."

CHAPTER V.

THE WOMAN AND THE CIGARETTE.

The detective's first move after giving Chick the instructions as recorded at the close of the preceding chapter, was to call for the key of the senator's room and to visit it, where he spent almost an hour in a thorough inspection of the baggage and papers; not from any motive of curiosity, but in the hope that he might find there some clue to the possible movements of the senator after his arrival in the city.

While the detective realized that a deep-laid plot was being worked out against himself and the senator, he regarded the latter as a mere incident in the importance of the affair from the standpoint of the schemers, and he could not reason out logically to his own satisfaction why the senator's liberty should have been interfered with unless it were that the "matters of gravest importance," to which the senator referred in his letter were such that the schemers did not wish imparted to the detective.

But although the detective searched everything with the utmost thoroughness, he completed his task as greatly mystified as when he began it; and so it was, that having replaced everything as he had found it, he descended again to the hotel office, where, after sitting for a time in one of the chairs that were backed up against the walls of the corridor, he arose and passed leisurely through that part of the famous hostelry which is popularly supposed to be devoted to the feminine guests of the hotel.

Here, there was a galaxy of fashion, if not exactly of beauty, arrayed on either side of him. Groups of women—two or three—were chatting vivaciously together; men and women sat vis-à-vis here and there along the corridor, and the scene was, as it always is at such an hour, one of gaiety and a display of costumes and gem

He had strolled along this way nearly to the extremity of the corridor toward Fifth Avenue, when he was startled into the recollection of his disguise by hearing a pleasantly modulated feminine voice exclaim:

"Why, senator, how do you do?"

The detective turned quickly to discover a really beautiful woman, dressed in the latest of fashions and in the most expensive of costumes, glistening with gems and otherwise rendered attractive by all the arts that feminine uses can employ, who had risen abruptly from a low chair and was smilingly confronting him.

Her big, dark eyes were glistening expectantly, her lips were parted in a smile showing her perfect teeth, and altogether she was one who might have attracted all eyes, as she now did, even in a place of that kind, with so many other beauties surrounding her.

The detective bowed before her, accepting the hand that she extended, and wondering vainly who this woman could be, for the detective never doubted that she was indeed an acquaintance of the senator.

As if she divined the question in his mind, she went on quickly:

"I see, senator, that you do not do me the honor to remember me. Don't deny it, sir; it's plainly to be seen in the expression of your eyes."

"Madam," he replied, adopting the deferential manner toward women which he had often seen the senator assume, "it is not possible that you can think yourself forgotten."

"Nevertheless, sir, I defy you to call me by name."

"That, I am afraid, madam, I cannot do. I have a great memory for faces, and yours surely could never be forgotten if once seen, but names have a way of eluding me."

She smiled brightly and, with an inimitable gesture of invitation, sank back upon the seat she had been occupying so that he was perforce compelled to sit down beside her.

"Have you been long in the city?" she inquired, with a mischievous smile, as if purposely she avoided telling her name until he might recall it.

"No," he said. "I arrived last evening."

"And you are to remain some time?"

"That is indefinite, madam. I will remain so long as my business here may detain me. How extended that period may be, I do not know."

"Is it possible, senator, that you have business outside the weight of affairs of state?"

"All men have business affairs to attend to, madam."

"Which means, I suppose," she retorted, laughing, "that your present business here is certainly not mine."

"I should regret very much to think it concerned you, inasmuch as it is not at all pleasant."

She shrugged her shoulders and presently remarked:

"I, also, am here on business which is decidedly unpleasant and annoying. I am really overjoyed, senator, to have met you, because I need a confidant who will give me some very necessary advice."

"Indeed, madam, I am afraid I would be a very poor one to advise you."

"Not at all, senator. I think you are the very one to do it."

"Yes?" he replied, wishing that she had not discovered him.

"May I take you into my confidence, senator?" she asked, lowering the tone of her voice and inclining her body toward him so that her manner appeared quite confidential.

"I would be the last one to refuse you, madam, in case you deemed such a proceeding wise, but really——"

"I suppose you think," she interrupted him, "because you have almost forgotten me and do not wish to admit it, that perhaps I should not confide in you; but I must tell you, sir, that although your memory is troubled concerning me, I have every reason to remember you."

"Indeed?" he said again.

"I am, or rather I was, Laura Thomas. You and my father were very old friends indeed, I believe."

This was said so naturally and with such evident earnestness, that Nick could not doubt the correctness of the statement, but as he had no idea who the senator's friend, Thomas, might have been, or where he lived, the detective was obliged to accept it as she stated it, and he waited, discreetly silent, until she continued:

"My name is now Faxton. I married Lieutenant Faxton of the army, as doubtless you know."

The detective made no reply to this statement, thus giving by his silence an affirmative answer to her implied question; and she smiled more brightly than ever, as, leaning toward him again, she whispered mysteriously:

"I want the services of a detective, senator, and the moment I saw you approaching, I knew that you could recommend one to me."

"A detective?" he questioned her, turning around and regarding her more earnestly than he had done before.

"Yes," she replied. "It is about that that I wish to confide in you and ask your advice."

"I beg, madam, that you will not do so," he said hastily. "I apprehend that the services you require are of such a personal nature that it would be better for me not to hear them. I suggest that you find a detective and confide in him, alone."

"I was in hopes," she said, "that you would take me to one. You see, senator, I am here alone. I only arrived this morning—came straight through from the West, you know—and I was just wondering what course I would pursue in order to accomplish the purpose of my errand here, when you appeared before me as an answer to my question."

"Well?" he said non-committally.

"The home papers, some time ago," she went on, "referred in an abstract way to some experiences you have had with a noted detective of the East, but the name has escaped me, but you know how quickly one will think, senator, and the moment your face appeared before me, I recalled what I had read, and instantly decided that you were the solution of my present problem."

"Very well," he said. "What can I do for you, Mrs. Faxton?"

"First, I beg that you will not call me by that name," she exclaimed with some petulance. "Call me 'Laura,' just as you used to do when I was a child."

"Gee!" thought the detective silently. "Did I ever do that?" and he added aloud with sudden determination that if he played his character at all he must do it thoroughly. "Very well, Laura, since you insist upon it. What is it you want me to do?"

"I want you to take me to that detective, whom you know here in the city of New York, and introduce me to him."

"Do you mean Nick Carter?" he asked.

"Yes; that is the name. I had forgotten it."

"When do you want to go?"

"Now," she said.

"I am afraid that is impossible," he said, shaking his head dubiously.

"Why so? Have you other matters to attend to? Other engagements on hand for this evening?"

"N—o," he hesitated. "Nothing of importance; only I happen to know that the detective whom you mentioned is not at home. I, myself, had an appointment with him which he has not kept, or at least, we have failed to meet."

"But you will take me to him, senator?"

"Oh, yes, perhaps, or I will do better; I will step over there to the desk and write a letter, which you may take to him and deliver in person."

"No," she said. "That is not what I want. I know that I seem to be imposing upon you, but I am particularly anxious to have you introduce me there. Are you sure, senator, that he is not at home this evening? It is not yet eight o'clock."

"I am quite positive of it, madam. As positive as I could be without absolute knowledge."

"But he might be there by the time we arrived," she said.

"Yes," said Nick with sudden resolution; "it is more than likely that he might be there when we got there," and deciding suddenly that it would be the best way to get rid of this woman, to take her to the house and let her hear Joseph say the detective was not at home, and he did not know when he would arrive, he added: "I will take you there if you like, now, and so show you the way. If he happens not to be there you can go again, another time, without me."

"Oh, will you?" she exclaimed, starting to her feet.

"Certainly," said Nick. "If you will get your wraps, I will order a carriage."

"Thank you!" she exclaimed effusively. "I will meet you here, senator, in ten minutes;" and without another word she turned rapidly away from him and hastened toward the elevator.

When she was gone, Nick went through the corridor to the carriage clerk's desk and gave his order, and then perceiving that Chick was not far away, he approached him and spoke rapidly.

"Did you see the woman, Chick?" he asked.

"Yes. Who is she?"

"That is what I want you to find out, Chick. Her name is Faxton, or she may have registered under her maiden name of Thomas. She wants to interview me for some reason that I cannot determine, although, of course, she has no idea that I am Nick Carter in disguise. To get rid of her I am going to drive her around to the house. It is quite evident that she is an old acquaintance of the senator about whom I am expected to know a great deal more than I do. Keep your eyes open while we are gone, which will be about three-quarters of an hour."

He went to the desk, then, and told Sammy, the clerk, that he was going out for a half or three-quarters of an hour, and that any one who should call for him in the meantime should be told to wait.

And then the attractive Mrs. Faxton reappeared, and with all the airs of the senator from the West, Nick conducted her to the carriage and assisted her to enter it.

When Nick had given the driver the necessary directions, he took his seat beside the woman, and they drove almost in silence to the detective's house, where they detective said to her:

"If you will wait here a moment, madam, I will inquire if Mr. Carter is at home;" but notwithstanding his request she followed him from the carriage and up the steps and stood beside him while he rang the bell.

The result of their inquiry can of course be determined, and it was not until they were seated side by side again in the carriage that the woman made any remark. Then with a semi-defiant shrug of her shoulders she produced a gold cigarette-case from some hidden receptacle and, having abstracted one from it, held it up before the detective's eyes and inquired laughingly:

"I am addicted to this habit, senator, however much it may shock you. Will you ask the driver to go slowly while I take my allotted six whiffs? Let him drive as far as the entrance to the Park and back again; surely you will humor me that far?"

"Certainly," he replied; and he leaned from the window long enough to give the necessary orders, and so did not see her when she hastily concealed the cigarette-case and produced another one exactly like it. She had lighted a match and was holding it to her own cigarette

when the detective faced her again, and the case, which he supposed to be the same one, was lying upon her lap.

"Surely, you will take one also?" she inquired with a smile, after a moment.

He was about to decline when, with a little gesture of petulance, she seized the case and held it before him, exclaiming:

"If you refuse, senator, I shall think that you don't approve of my act."

"Perhaps I do not," he replied.

"Nevertheless, take one of my cigarettes; smoke it to please me."

"Since it will please you so much, madam," he replied gravely, and he accepted one and lighted it.

And from the moment when Nick Carter touched the match to that cigarette and inhaled the fumes which passed from it to his lungs and brain, he remembered nothing of that ride with Madam Faxton.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PASSENGERS ACROSS THE FERRY.

At the hotel, Chick strolled up and down the corridors, now and then seating himself for an interval in one of the chairs along the walls while he awaited the return of his chief, who had said that he would be absent less than an hour.

But when an hour, and finally two hours, had elapsed and the hands of the great clock indicated that it was almost ten, Chick began to wonder at the non-return of Nick Carter. He was on the point of going to the telephone-booth to call up the house and inquire of Joseph if the detective had been there with the woman, when he was startled by seeing her pass in through the entrance alone. She looked exactly as she had when Nick was talking with her in the corridor, save, of course, that her light opera-cloak hung negligently from her shoulders, and she paused in the middle of the passageway while she peered eagerly around her as if in search of some one.

It was Chick's impulse then to step forward and speak to her, but he controlled it and waited, the thought occurring to him that perhaps Nick had come in by some other entrance and that she was looking for him.

No one appeared, however, in answer to her inquiring glances, and presently she resumed the same seat she had occupied during her conversation with Nick Carter.

A quarter of an hour passed, and then as no one had appeared, Chick, with sudden resolution, approached her and she looked up with a little exclamation of surprise, not unmingled with alarm, when he addressed her.

"I beg your pardon, madam," he said, "I am a stranger to you, but I am seeking a gentleman whom I am informed left the hotel with you earlier this evening. I thought perhaps you might be able to tell me when he would return."

She raised her brows and her eyes grew cold, and it was surprising how cold and repellent their expression could be, when she chose to render them so.

"I suppose, sir," she said, "you refer to the senator?"

"I do, madam."

"Is he not in the hotel?"

"No. I have been unable to find him. They told me you went away together in a carriage and that he was expected to return shortly."

"And then——?" she asked with a touch of insolence in the incompleted sentence.

"Then, madam," said Chick, bowing again, "I presumed on your good nature sufficiently to ask you for information."

"Really, sir, I have none to give you."

"I hoped," said Chick, "that the senator might have said something to you about his plans for the evening. It is really very important that I should see him."

"Doubtless he has gone to his room, sir. I left him at the hotel entrance." She turned her head coldly away as she said this, as if to end the interview, but Chick, whose suspicions were now thoroughly aroused by her manner, for he was impressed with the idea that not only was she playing a part, but that she was rather overdoing it, resolutely seated himself beside her.

At this, she turned toward him with a haughty stare, and exclaimed so that others near them might have heard had they been listening:

"Really, sir, you presume too far, I think;" and before Chick could reply to her, she started to her feet and swept down the corridor with the air of a queen.

Grafton, the hotel detective, was approaching from the other end of the corridor at that moment, and Chick hastened toward him immediately and whispered almost without pausing:

"Grafton, I am Chick. You may have tumbled to the fact, but I wanted to be sure. Will you keep your eye on that black-eyed woman yonder, for me, for a short time?"

He did not wait for a reply, but hurried on to the desk, where he asked Sammy if the senator had returned, receiving, of course, a negative reply.

Chick was satisfied now, although without a single bit of evidence to uphold it, that Nick had somehow been entrapped by the wiles of this woman who had lured him into the carriage on a pretense of wishing to visit the detective, and so had led him into difficulties that he did not foresee and could not suspect.

He knew, without the necessity of questioning Sammy, that Nick would not have returned to the hotel without having made his presence known to his assistant, and so he determined now, on the spot, that the very circumstance which Nick Carter had planned for, had occurred;

that is, that one of the spies had appeared, but not at all in the manner or in the character that was expected.

Grafton, as well as the woman, had disappeared when he looked for them again, but after a considerable search, he found them finally over at the Egyptian Room, where Grafton was hovering near the entrance, and where Madam Faxton was seated in one corner of the room in close conversation with a man whose very appearance gave Chick a sudden start of pleased surprise.

The man was Dumont, who had been, during their Washington experiences, the lieutenant of Mustushimi, the chief of the spy system.

If Nick Carter's assistant needed anything to assure him of the correctness of his surmises, he had it here, and standing so that he could not be seen by the woman or her companion, he called Grafton to him with a gesture.

"What do you know about that woman, Grafton?" he asked.

"Not a thing," was the reply.

"Is she a guest at the hotel?"

"I don't think so."

"Do you know anything about the man?"

"No. I never saw him before."

"I am here alone, Grafton," said Chick after a moment's thought. "Nick was here a little while ago and he has not returned. I don't know where he is or when he will come back."

"All of which means that you want me to help you," replied Grafton, smiling.

"Yes. If you will do so."

"I will if I can. What do you want me to do?"

"I would like to have you, if you will, and if it is possible for you to leave the hotel if the necessity arises, keep your eye on either one of those two which you are pleased to select. I will take the other one myself."

"Suppose they leave the house together?" said Grafton. "It won't be necessary for us both to go, then?"

"No. In that case I will take the trail and not bother you about it, but it is my impression that they will separate as soon as this present conference is ended."

"All right," said Grafton, "I will help you out."

"Thank you, old man; which one will you take, the man or the woman?"

"The man, if it is all the same to you, Chick."

There was no opportunity for further conversation between them, for at that instant the two persons in whom they were interested left their secluded corner and came toward the door, from which they passed along to the entrance to the hotel, where Dumont directed one of the employees to call a carriage for him.

Chick would have liked the opportunity to have made some alteration in his disguise, having already talked with Madam Faxton, as he had, but this was impossible, now, for less than two minutes elapsed when she, with a laughing "good night" to Dumont, turned from him, ran down the steps, and, crossing the pavement, sprang lightly into the waiting carriage, and no sooner had she entered it than the door was slammed shut and the driver started rapidly away.

Chick realized that he must act quickly, if at all, and must take the risk of letting the woman know that he was following her, and so he sprang outside at once and into one of the waiting hansoms, exclaiming to the driver as he did so:

"Keep that carriage in sight! Double fare!"

He did not doubt that Dumont must have seen and understood his act, and he knew it would serve as a warning to the spy, but yet there seemed no other course for him to pursue, and matters had now arrived at such a stage where he felt that it was necessary to take the risk.

Besides, he knew that he could rely upon Grafton to keep Dumont under espionage, and he surmised it was perhaps as well to have forced a play from Dumont's hand.

Seated in a hansom, as he was, with the whole front open before him, he could see clearly the carriage they were following, which drove on rapidly, but nevertheless with a direct course, which gave the impression that its occupant had no idea that she was followed.

They turned into Fifth Avenue and drove north along the Park and continued along the eastern driveway to 110th Street, and thence along St. Nicholas Avenue to 125th Street, where they turned westward and eventually passed out upon a ferry-boat of the 130th Street Ferry to Fort Lee.

Chick's driver had stuck doggedly to his task, and it was one to which he was evidently not accustomed, since he had kept altogether too close to this quarry; so close, in fact, that had either the woman or her driver looked behind they must have guessed, long before they drove upon the ferry-boat, that they were followed.

And once upon the boat—it was now after eleven o'clock at night—Chick discovered that theirs were the only vehicles of any sort that had taken passage for that trip across the river, and Chick decided that he would use the opportunity, while crossing, to again speak to the woman. They were no sooner well out upon the river before Chick got down from the hansom and walked forward toward the carriage in which Laura Faxton was a passenger; and as he approached it, the door of it was thrown open and she stepped outside, turning so that she confronted him just before he reached it.

She stopped abruptly, facing him, and he came to a halt also, for he saw plainly now that she had known all along that he was upon her trail. It was a situation that Chick rather enjoyed, for he saw in her act that Laura Faxton meant to defy him, at least, and he believed that he could make her angry.

"You have dared to follow me!" she exclaimed haugh-

tily, and standing with assumed outraged dignity before him.

"Yes, madam," he replied.

"Why?" she demanded.

"Because I wished to find the senator, and I think that eventually you will take me to him," he responded coolly.

She shrugged her shoulders and laughed. It was not a pleasant laugh to hear, and then moving back a step, she waved her left hand toward her own carriage, and said:

"Since it is your desire to keep me in sight, perhaps it would be better if you were to ride with me."

Chick was not averse to this, believing, of course, that she was alone in the carriage, and, with an inclination of his head, he stepped forward, past her, and to the open door of the carriage she had so lately left.

As he reached it and was about to peer inside, a pair of hands were thrust quickly from it and seized him by the throat and at the same instant, before he could cry out or utter any exclamation whatever, the woman dealt him a blow from behind which effectually stunned him, and the next instant the door of the carriage slammed shut, with Chick a prisoner inside of it.

CHAPTER VII.

PRISONERS IN A MADHOUSE.

Nick Carter, after his novel experience with the cigarette in the carriage of Laura Faxton, did not return to consciousness for so long a time that he had lost all trace of it.

And when he did revive, it was with an aching head and a momentary loss of memory, so that he had not at once the least idea where he was or what had happened to him.

He was lying on his back on a couch, in a room that had been darkened by drawn curtains, but he could tell that daylight was shining without, and he was conscious at the same time that he was somewhere out in the country.

The smell of the foliage around the place told him that much, and for several moments he remained perfectly still, while he tried to collect his thoughts sufficiently to remember what had happened to him.

Memory came at last; slowly, to be sure, but it returned to him; and as such things will restore themselves to the recollection, the realization of it all came to him backward.

He recalled first the carriage with himself and Mrs. Faxton as passengers inside it; the visit to his own house, the cigarette—and then like a cloud it all rushed upon him.

He remembered in that instant, too, that he was disguised as the senator; or rather that he had been so disguised when he lighted that cigarette; and now he started to his feet and strode across the room to a mirror at the opposite side of it.

His disguise had not been touched, and it was evident to him that he had been brought at once to this place, wherever it might be, in the same carriage in which he had been drugged, that he had been carried to the room where he was now a prisoner, and left there, without any investigation concerning him being made—save the emptying of his pockets; for he quickly discovered that their contents had been removed very thoroughly indeed.

There was nothing left to him that they had contained, save his handkerchiefs, and his captors must have had knowledge of the little weapons he was in the habit of carrying in his sleeves, for they, too, were missing.

Outwardly he was still the senator, and he argued that it was more than likely that his captors had not discovered the deception; so the question arose in his mind whether he should attempt to keep up the deception, or should admit at once his identity?

The question, however, was to be decided for him in rather a remarkable manner.

Examining the room where he was a prisoner, he saw only an ordinary apartment, rather large in extent. It was square in shape; there were two windows against which shutters had been closed on the outside, and between himself and the shutters were strong iron bars which might well have done service at the Tombs in New York.

There was a table in the center of the room with some books upon it, and a hanging kerosene-lamp above it; there was a single bed in one corner, a rug covered the floor over a matting of straw, two or three pictures hung against the walls, there were four chairs—and there were two doors which he decided, without examination, were barred against him.

The mirror, into which he had glanced to see if he was still the senator, was above the old-fashioned marble mantel, and beside that stood a bureau of antique design.

He raised one of the windows, and, reaching through the bars with his fingers, attempted to open the shutters, but only to find that they were securely fastened. He could only peer past them as best he might through the small openings, and discover thereby that the house was surrounded by trees that were thick with foliage; so he returned to the chair that was beside the table, and seated himself upon it.

"This is a most remarkable experience, take it all in all," he mused to himself. "First I started out this morning—no, yesterday morning, evidently—to make what seemed to be a perfectly innocent call, only to have my car wrecked beneath me, and to go through a nar-

row escape from injury because of it; next, somebody tries to drop a rock upon my head from the walls of a new building; and next, because I have disguised myself as the senator from the West, I permit myself to be bamboozled by a woman who succeeds in convincing me that she is an old acquaintance of his.

"Of course, if I had been in my own proper person, I would never have been taken in by such a transparent subterfuge; but being in the guise of the senator—well, there is no use in dwelling upon that.

"But the cigarette!" Nick laughed aloud at his own stupidity in falling into such a trap. "It was unworthy of an amateur to do such a thing," he told himself. "But it must have been some exceedingly powerful agent that I inhaled with that first whiff, for I didn't need a second one. I positively do not remember a thing that happened after I touched the lighted match to the end of it."

He turned then and studied the two doors already mentioned. From their relative positions, he judged that one of them gave upon the hallway of the house, on that floor, and that the other opened upon another room.

He had no doubt that they were locked and barred against him, but he resolved to try them at once, and he gave his attention first to the hall door.

It was fastened; but when he passed to the other one, it opened readily enough, and he found himself in a narrow entry between two rooms, with a small sliding door directly in front of him.

This door also responded to his touch, and he pushed it aside, and passed through into the adjoining room.

He came to a sudden stop when he entered it, and he could barely repress an exclamation at what he saw.

If his enemies had calculated upon a surprise for him, they had certainly accomplished it, for he was suddenly brought face to face with both his assistants who were engaged upon the case with him—Chick and Patsy.

Both were staring at the detective with wide-open eyes, and in that dim light they could not determine whether it was the senator who had thus suddenly come upon them or if it was Nick Carter himself, in his disguise as the senator.

The encounter was rather ludicrous from one point of view—somewhat tragic from another.

If the reader has ever seen an article that is much in use in institutions for the insane, called a "straight-jacket," he will know in what manner Chick and Patsy were rendered helpless; and in addition to this article of dress, which each wore, both were fastened to rings in the wall, by short chains and other rings around their ankles.

They were at opposite sides of the room, facing each other. Their chains were long enough to permit them to lie down, and there was a mattress and a chair near each of them for their use.

The room itself was not unlike the one in which Nick had awakened to consciousness, save that it was more bare of furniture. But the windows were securely barred in the same way, and the whole place had the appearance of one that had been especially planned for the detention of unruly captives; as if it were a prison, or a private asylum for the insane.

Straight-jackets are made of leather, and are made to fit over the arms so that the latter may not be lifted at all; and they are frequently made so long that they permit the use of the legs only in small, mincing steps. They are impossible things; horrible things, and once inside of one that has been laced on or buckled on with straps—they are arranged in both ways—it is impossible to escape from one of them.

It was Chick who spoke first, for all three were staring at one another in speechless amazement. Nick had supposed Patsy safely in Washington, and Chick still at the Hotel Mammoth, attending to his duty; and here they were before him, prisoners like himself, although in infinitely worse plights.

"Are you the senator, or are you Nick?" he asked. "The light is so bad here that I cannot tell," and Dick laughed aloud, his own natural laugh, which was sufficient reply to the question.

"So they got you, too, did they?" Chick continued. "I was afraid they had done so. It was in trying to follow that woman who took you away, Nick, that I got myself into a trap."

"She seems to be prolific in the setting of traps," replied Nick, with another laugh.

Then he stepped nearer to them quickly, and in a low tone added:

"Look here, boys; there may be some one listening. I want both of you, no matter what happens, to address me and treat me as if I were the senator. Understand?"

They nodded in the affirmative, and Nick continued:

"I don't know why your captors thought it best to bind you up in this manner, while they left me perfectly free, save for the barred windows and doors; but I'll soon have you out of those straight-jackets. Upon my word, this place must be a private sanatorium of some sort."

"It is," replied Chick, "or was. These straight-jackets were handy, and they put them on us."

"Wait now," said the detective, "until I get those things off you, and then you shall tell me all about it. I confess that I am curious."

Both the jackets were of the kind that lace with leather strings, and Nick soon removed them, whereupon his assistants breathed more freely.

But the anklets, the chains, and the rings in the walls

were different matters, and they defied all the great strength of the detective to remove them.

He had not an implement of any sort with which to break them, and at last he gave up the attempt for the present, with the remark:

"I am afraid that for the time you will have to remain chained to the wall. Now, Chick, tell me what happened to you."

Thereupon Chick related all that we know already, up to the moment when the hands were thrust from the door of the carriage on the ferry-boat, and seized upon him, and the blow fell upon his head from behind, dealt by the woman he had been following.

"That rap on the head," he concluded, "knocked me silly. I hadn't the least idea that there was or had been anybody in the carriage but the woman, so I was not prepared in the least for the attack."

"And after that——?" asked the detective.

"After that I was brought here; but they chloroformed me first. I couldn't help myself, you know. And when I came around, about half an hour ago, I was fixed up as you see me now, and Patsy was staring at me from the other side of the room."

"So you had only been conscious about half an hour, when I entered the room?" asked Nick.

"About that."

"How about you, Patsy? What brought you here?"

"Luck, I suppose—or rather the lack of it."

"But you started for Washington."

"I did, sure. But I didn't get there."

"What held you up, Patsy?"

"A mere sight of the man Dumont. I saw him. I thought to myself, 'Here is my play, to follow that fellow,' and I followed him. It was on the ferry, on the way to Jersey City, that he showed himself. When we went ashore, he left the station and went out on Montgomery Street, with me after him, of course. He went around into one of the back streets—I didn't know the name of it—and presently entered a saloon. I waited a minute, and then followed him in at the door, and I had no sooner entered it than a half-dozen men jumped on me all at once. I hadn't a chance in the world, and before I knew what had happened I was tied up like a sheep, laid on the floor, and there was his nibs Dumont, standing over me, smiling as if he had won some sort of a prize competition."

"And then——?" asked Nick.

"Then they served me as they did Chick. They chloroformed me, and when I came out of it, sure, I was here as you see me now. Then, long after that, they brought Chick here; and that is all I know about it."

"They seem to have done their work very thoroughly," remarked the detective. "I wonder, now, what their next move will be?"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE AWFUL AGONY OF THIRST.

This was the first time in all the history of Nick Carter when, one after another, two of his assistants and himself had fallen into the snares set for them by others, and the detective could not help thinking, now that he could see more clearly, that the design had been from the first to accomplish this very purpose.

He believed now that the entire plot was against himself and his assistants, and that the senator had merely been used as a catspaw for the plotters.

"But what has become of the senator?" he asked himself.

If the statesman had also been a prisoner there, he might—— But he was not, and cogitation on that point was utterly useless.

"Do the people who have captured us still believe that I am the senator?" he asked himself, in the form of a second question; but this, like the first one, was useless, and he would only get the answer to it when one or more of those who were the cause of the present difficulties should appear, to make known their intentions.

In the meantime he busied himself in trying to free Chick and Patsy from their chains, which held them bound tightly to the walls; but he could not succeed in doing so.

With that masterly ingenuity which is the result of long practise, everything had been removed from the rooms which could serve him; there was not an article of furniture in the lot which could be made serviceable as a lever, even if torn apart, and the chains were too strong, the staples in the walls too firm, and the anklets too well made for him to break any of them.

So he made his two assistants as comfortable as he could under the circumstances, and then set about to discover a way to liberty for himself, trusting that if he accomplished this he might quickly succeed in freeing his friends.

But there was no way open.

The windows were guarded by strong bars set into stone, so that nothing short of a crowbar, or a fine saw for cutting metal, would serve him.

But there were the doors into the halls, if only he could pry one of them open.

He might as well have attempted to pry aside the partition itself, for the doors were of heavy oak, and were innocent of handles, or knobs or latches of any sort on the inside. Doubtless, too, there were other iron bars beyond them, for if the house had been used as a private asylum it went without saying that it was thoroughly equipped.

"Somebody will have to come here presently, to bring food and drink to us," he remarked grimly to Chick, "and I think I will take chances in capturing whoever does that."

"Perhaps nobody will come here at all," said Chick. "Possibly they mean to leave us just where we are."

"To starve to death?" asked Patsy.

Chick nodded.

"When they brought me in here, Patsy says they did not utter a word to him," continued the assistant, addressing his master. "That was the only time he has seen or heard anything about them since he was brought here, save that we both heard a noise in the adjoining room several hours ago; and that must have been when you were taken there, Nick."

"I haven't had a drop of water or a morsel of food since I was brought here," said Patsy. "To be sure, that isn't so very long ago, but it is long enough so that I am hungry, all right."

Nick began to have an uneasy feeling that the suggestions made by his assistants might be correct; that their captors meant to "forget" them, after the fashion in which prisoners are sometimes "forgotten" in the dungeons of Europe—and in places in South America.

As the day wore away—it had been early morning when he roused to consciousness—and no sign of other presence in the house save their own came to them, Nick began to fear that this was indeed the situation; or, at least, if they did not mean to starve him and his companions, it was intended at least to reduce them to despair by hunger and thirst, before relief in any manner should be offered.

When night came and still there was no sign, he was convinced of this.

He had managed during the day, by breaking up part of the furniture, to force the shutters of one of the windows; but nothing came of it.

They could look out upon a thickly wooded scene, where the underbrush was so thick beneath the trees that it gave silent evidence of the utter desertion as well as desolation of the place.

He tried to pry the bars apart with these same instruments, but unavailingly. The bars were too firmly in place, too strong, and the improvised implements were not sufficient. They only broke in the detective's grasp.

He attacked the doors in the same manner, but nothing came of it; not even a sound made by their captors, who should have heard the onslaughts against the doors, were any in the old house.

By the second morning it was maddening.

There seemed to be no doubt now that they were deserted to their fate; and it had suddenly occurred to Nick that in all probability the senator was in another part of the house, also a prisoner, where he had been left to starve alone.

Nick believed now that he knew well enough why this determined attack upon him had been made.

Twice already he had broken up the spy system organized in this country by Mustushimi, and the latter had therefore been brought to the realization that his methods could not succeed in the United States, as long as Nick Carter and his assistants were on earth.

In reorganizing, he had brought all his forces to bear first upon the one point of ridding himself of the detective. That done, he might proceed with his other plans practically unmolested.

Our three friends had now forgotten their hunger in the maddening thirst they felt.

Patsy had become absolutely silent, save when spoken to; but then, always, he made an effort to reply cheerfully.

At first he had whistled cheerily, but now his lips were so parched that that was no longer possible. Chick strove bravely to keep up his spirits, and frequently suggested new efforts for Nick to try, in the way of setting them at liberty.

The second night came and went and the third morning followed, and by now Patsy had ceased to reply when spoken to, for it was evident that he suffered even more than the others.

Even Chick could think of nothing more to suggest, and had dropped into silence save when Nick addressed him; and then he replied only in monosyllables. Despair was settling upon him, too.

Nick, who could obtain exercise by walking about the two rooms, was better off than any of them; but even he had exhausted every expedient he could think of in his efforts to find a way out of their prison.

The bars remained immovable; the doors resisted every effort to budge them. Only two of the shutters had given way before Nick's attacks.

It was noon of the third day when they heard the sound of steps approaching along the hall outside the door; and Nick, who had resolved to attack the man who entered, no matter who he might be, glided quickly to a place beside the door that he had chosen, and stood there waiting, ready to spring when a key grated in the lock, and the sound of moving bolts could be heard.

Then the door was thrown open, and Nick Carter started forward in a half-spring, quickly recovering himself, however, and straightening up at once, for he had almost leaped against a grated iron door, just like those which guard the cells of regular prisons. It closed the opening outside the wooden door, and beyond it, leering in at them through the bars, was the cruel, if handsome, face of Mustushimi himself.

"How do you do, gentlemen?" he said, in his oily voice, rubbing his hands unctuously together. "I hope I find you well—and happy? No?"

Nick had recovered himself instantly, and now, bringing all his powers of resource into play, and controlling

his voice so that there was not a sign of weakness about it, he said:

"Ah! The Baron Mustushimi. I supposed, baron, that you were on your way to Japan."

"Did you? By the way, shall I call you senator, or Nick Carter? Which do you prefer?"

"Either one will answer, baron."

"To be sure. You wear one name as well as the other. You see, Mr. Carter, my men told me that the senator was here. I did not know the difference until I opened the door.'

"But you see it now, eh, baron?"

"Plainly. In trying to break your way out of your prison, you have disarranged your disguise so that there is very little of it left. I suppose you had forgotten that; no?"

"Yes. I had forgotten it, baron."

"You are a disappointment, Carter. I thought the senator was here."

"Perhaps you have visited the wrong room," suggested Nick.

"Oh, no. I will repeat—you are in one sense a disappointment, although in another a particular delight. I don't suppose that you and your companions are hungry, Mr. Carter?"

"Somewhat—yes."

"And thirsty?'

"Very."

"You would like food and drink? No?"

"Water more than anything else, baron."

"You shall have it at once, of course," grinned the baron.

"Thank you."

"I said at once; did you understand?"

"Perfectly. I hope, indeed, that you will lose no time in fetching it."

"Of course, Mr. Carter, there is a condition."

"I supposed as much, baron."

"Then you will agree to it?"

"It will be necessary that I hear it before I can agree to it."

"But you can imagine what it is?"

"Really, baron, you waste time—and we are very thirsty."

The baron departed from the grated door and darted away on a run; but he presently returned again, bearing a common china cup in his hand; but during the short time that he was absent Nick had determined his own course of action.

It was a desperate one, to be sure, and might not succeed; but he knew the baron well enough, or believed he did, to know that the little scoundrel would show no mercy, and still less compassion, for their sufferings. And when he saw the baron returning with only a single china cup, that could not hold more than a gill of water, he knew that he had reasoned correctly.

"See," said the baron, with his devilish smile. "I bring you water. So much. There is a swallow of it—yes, a full swallow—for each of you. Ah! It will taste like nectar. No? You shall take it in your hand, Mr. Carter, to give a swallow to each of your companions, and when they have tasted it, you shall have a swallow yourself. And then, my dear Mr. Carter, if you agree to my terms, you shall have all the water you wish. And food. Think of it—water and food! But, above all, water in plenty. It is pleasant to think of it, is it not?"

All this time he was standing out of reach of the detective, holding the cup of water tantalizingly in his hand, and actually spilling a few drops of it over the edge, as if in mockery of their necessities.

"And now," he said, "I give it to you—so!" and he stepped forward, close to the grating, and reached his hand, containing the cup, through between the bars.

That was the instant for which the detective had waited. That was the moment for which he had longed during all the time of his weary imprisonment.

And now, when the baron's arm was stretched through the bars, bearing the cup of precious water, Nick Carter played his desperate card.

CHAPTER IX.

NICK CARTER SEIZES AN OPPORTUNITY.

Nick Carter seized the arm that was extended through the grating, and held it.

The cup of precious fluid was dashed to the floor and shattered, and the contents spilled—contents so precious that the weight of it a thousand times, in gold, would not have expressed its value.

The baron had not reckoned upon this. It had never occurred to him that Nick Carter would risk the chance of losing the precious fluid in order to seize upon him and hold him. If he had thought of the possibility at all, he had figured that the men in the room were so nearly per-

ished with thirst that they would think only of the water.

Indeed, that was all that Chick and Patsy had thought about, and they had watched the transfer of it—or the beginning of the act—in a fever of expectancy; and when the cup was dashed to the floor and spilled, they both cried out, involuntarily, with dismay.

But Nick knew that the cup containing less than a gill of water was brought to them only for the purpose of adding to their tortures. He knew that the baron intended only to tantalize them with the taste of it; to refuse them more unless they should agree to some proposition of his; and doubtless even then. For Nick knew how bitterly the baron hated them all, and how sweet this revenge was to his hellish spirit.

Therefore he did not hesitate at the loss of the water, which was, after all, less than a drop in the bucket, considering the extremity to which they had already been reduced.

So he seized the baron's arm—seized it in a viselike grip, and instantly pulled the man himself, up against the bars, with a jerk that made him groan.

And as he did that, he seized the other arm by reaching through the bars, and he pulled that one toward him also, and held them both there, with the face of the baron pressed into an opening between them.

And there he held him.

The baron at first sought vainly, by struggling, to free himself.

Then he cursed and swore, and shouted in Japanese; then in English; but all the while Nick held on grimly—and all the while he smiled, forgetful of his thirst, for the moment, in the assurance that the baron's acts gave him that the man had come to the house alone; or, at least, that none of his companions were within the sound of his voice.

The baron was a little man, it will be remembered, and Nick, who had apparently lost nothing of his own great strength, did not find it difficult to hold him against the bars; and he continued to hold him so until the Jap ceased his struggles, and remained still, though panting with his exertions.

Then the detective spoke to him, while at the same time he made ready to proceed with the plan he had outlined.

"Baron," he said, "I suppose you know that I can strike a hard blow with my fist; do you not? . . . Answer me!"

"Yes. Oh, yes," was the reply.

"You perceive, don't you, that your face is quite close to me, between those bars, and that I can easily strike it with my fist?"

"Yes."

"Very well—now if you don't want your ugly face pounded to a jelly, while I hold you in your present position, you will immediately obey the orders I give you. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"I am going to release my hold on one of your hands, but I shall retain my hold upon the other one. If you try to pull the free hand back through the bars, I shall strike you with my fist in the face. Now, will you hold the hand still when I release it?"

"Yes."

"You are sensible, baron."

Nick released the hand and waited an instant to observe if the baron obeyed him; and, as he did so, the detective thrust his own free hand in his pocket and brought out a wire cord, which he had previously taken from one of the pictures on the walls in the room where he awakened to consciousness.

He had already provided a sliding noose at one end of it, and this he now passed over the baron's wrists. Then he released his hold upon the other hand, and wound the wire tightly around the baron's arms, spirally, until they were glued together tightly all the way to the bars.

"Now," said the detective grimly, "I think I have got you rather fast, baron;" and he took a second cord, like the first, from another pocket.

He quickly fashioned another noose in the end of it, and then reaching through the bars, he passed it over the baron's head, and tightened it around his throat so that it just escaped choking him; and, having arranged it to his satisfaction, he wound it round and round one of the bars until the baron could not move his head an inch.

Then Nick ran into the adjoining room and brought back two more pieces of wire cord, and these, one after the other, he fastened around the baron's legs, below the knees, and again around the bars of the grated door.

"Now, baron," he said, "I have got you fast. So fast that you cannot get loose unless I decide to release you; so fast that if any of your friends should appear suddenly on this little scene of ours, they could not release you until after I had killed you—with this."

He held up a long, dagger-shaped piece of glass which he had broken out of one of the windows. It was pointed at one end and broad at the other extremity, and could be, if properly used, an ugly weapon.

Nick pressed the point of it against the baron's throat, and scratched him just a little.

"Now, baron," he said, "I did that to show you how completely at my mercy you are. Do you understand that?"

"Yes. Why do you do this? What good will it do you? You can't get out."

"We will see about that presently. In the meantime, baron, are you listening to me?"

"Yes."

"In the meantime I don't know whether there is any one here with you or not."

"There are—two others, and they——"

"Never mind. I will do the talking, if you please. You will do the answering. Presently, when I am through with you, perhaps I will cut your throat with this glass. That will depend upon how tractable you prove to be. Understand that, baron?"

"Yes."

"If either of the two friends to whom you have referred should appear here, you are to warn them not to approach too closely, and not to make any effort to save you; for, if they should do that, I would have to use this at once;" and again he held up before the eyes of the baron the piece of glass. "Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"You are in a bad fix, baron. You came rather too close to me in your exultation over me, and in the hope that I would consent to the terms you intended to make. But I don't suppose for a moment that you really would have made any. I think you intended to murder us all who are inside this room."

"I did not. I did not, really——"

"Never mind. It doesn't matter now. I wonder what you have got in your pockets, baron?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all that——"

"I will just take a look for myself, all the same," interrupted the detective; and he began at once a systematic search of the baron's pockets, for now that the man was bound and held so close to the bars, it was comparatively an easy matter.

Nick found and appropriated to his own uses a huge clasp-knife, a revolver, a phial of chloroform, a bulky memorandum-book, written in Japanese—and a bunch of keys. The money and watch and other trinkets of the baron he replaced.

"These are what I wanted," he said, when he discovered the keys. "Baron, if one of these keys should happen to open the way out of this room, it will be a fortunate thing for you, for then, perhaps, I shall not kill you. You see, baron, we must get out of here at once. I do not suppose you realize that; but it is true. Where is the lock of this grated door located, baron?"

"At my left," replied the baron, in a weak voice, for he was thoroughly frightened now.

"Does one of these keys fit it?" asked Nick again.

"Yes."

"Which one, baron?" And Nick held the ring before his eyes so that he could see them.

"The largest of those flat keys," was the instant reply.

"Yes? Ah, yes. I will try it—if I can succeed in reaching the lock. If not, then I will have to make you do it for me."

He reached around past the jamb of the door, through the last opening in the bars, and discovered that he could just reach the lock by extending his left arm through the opening as far as it would go.

By continued and patient effort, then, he managed at last to slip the key into the lock, and at last to turn it, so that presently the bar had only to be lifted from its place to release the door—and in another moment the great iron-barred door swung outward, carrying the baron with it, and the way to liberty for himself was open.

But Chick and Patsy were still prisoners against the walls, where their chains held them; and both were slowly dying of thirst, and there was much to do before escape could be accomplished for all of them.

First he removed the lock from the iron door, so that by no chance it could be used again, and then with the bunch of keys in his hand he darted across the room and tried first one and then another, upon the rings that had been locked around Chick's and Patsy's wrists.

But not one of them sufficed for the purpose, and he returned to the baron.

"Where is the key to those manacles?" he demanded. "Answer me, and tell me, or——!" He paused significantly, and the baron cried out:

"Inside the small purse that you returned to my pocket, there is a key that fits them."

It did not take the detective long to find and produce that key, and with it he again darted across the room to his friends.

To release them was the work of a moment only, but he found, when he had done so, that Chick could barely stagger to his feet, and stand there tottering, and that Patsy could not stand at all; so again he darted away, this time in search of water.

And he found it—a great bucketful back in the hall, which the baron had evidently brought up with him when he came; and with this he returned, giving it to Chick and Patsy sparingly at first, but dashing plenty of it in their faces and upon their heads; and then he swallowed some of it himself

And, oh, how sweet it tasted; that water was filled with strength and courage and hope. He knew now that the way to liberty was open, and that in a few minutes more, with Chick and Patsy, he would be outside the house again, a free man.

He stroked their wrists and hands, and dashed more water in their faces; and then he gave them more to drink, working over them continuously, and for the moment utterly forgetful of the baron, and the open door to which the man was fastened.

And then, just as he had helped himself to a second drink of the water, he was startled by an exclamation from behind him, and he turned just in time to see two men rush forward toward it, through the hallway, and to hear the baron call to them: "Help! Help! Help!"

It was a crucial moment.

If the men reached the door first they might find a way to close and fasten it, notwithstanding the fact that the lock of it was inside the detective's pocket.

And it was then, as Nick leaped forward toward them, that he performed one of those miracles of snap-shooting for which he was famous.

The hand of one of the approaching men was already outstretched to seize upon the door, when Nick remembered that he had Mustushimi's pistol in his possession, and he pulled it from his pocket instantly.

CHAPTER X.

A MYSTERY ABOUT THE SENATOR.

That snap shot was really a wonderful one.

The bullet, fired the instant when Nick withdrew his hand from his pocket, pierced the palm of the foremost of the two men who were dashing forward to release their master and to imprison again Nick Carter and his assistants.

That hand never reached its goal—the bar that fitted over the hasp which held the iron door in place when it was closed.

The bullet passed through it, while the man who was hit uttered a howl of rage and terror, and collapsed upon the floor, no doubt believing that he had been mortally wounded.

And the second man, as if terrified by what had happened to his companion, and suddenly warned that the prisoners were armed, turned tail instantly and fled in the direction from which he had come, and Nick and the others could hear his footsteps along the corridors as he made his way through the lower part of the house, and finally out of it and apparently away.

Nick followed up his shot by dashing forward at full speed, and, as the fallen man struggled to his feet again, perceiving that he was not as badly hurt as he had supposed, struck him in the face with his fist, knocking him backward again, and this time rendering him senseless.

The bullet, in order to hit the target at which it was aimed, had to pass through the door between the bars and quite close to Mustushimi, and the baron believed that it had been aimed at him, evidently, for he had quietly fainted away.

Nick saw that he was hanging now in peril of his life, for when his form became limp and settled upon the wire cords with which the detective had bound him, his head sagged forward so that his throat was pressed against the cord that was around it.

And so Nick at once set him free from his uncomfortable position, but took good care to again bind him so securely that he could not escape; and then, having bound up the other fellow's wounded hand with some cloth torn from a sheet, he tied him up also, as he had served the baron.

And then, warning Chick that he and Patsy must be careful in the use of the water, and telling them that he would return at once, he dashed down the stairs and toward an open door at one end of the lower hall, through which he had no doubt the flying man had escaped.

But, although he must have reached it soon after the

man dashed through it in making his escape, there was no sign of him.

Believing that he and those who were in the hall and the room above were alone in the house now, he began at once a systematic search of the premises, although he had now arrived at the conclusion that the senator was not there.

Indeed, he recalled the words of Mustushimi in regard to the statesman, and realized now, for the first time, all that they might have meant.

The baron had said, in substance, that until he opened the door and looked upon his prisoner, he supposed him to be the senator.

If that expression meant anything at all, it meant that Mustushimi did not know where the senator was.

But that could not be true! Or, could it be true?

Until this moment there had been no doubt in the mind of the detective that Baron Mustushimi and his men were responsible for the mysterious disappearance of the senator; but it would seem, from what the baron had himself said, that he had no idea where the statesman was held.

Nick searched the house from top to bottom. He went into every room, and into the cellar and attic; and then he visited the outhouses, of which there were several, and searched them in the same thorough manner; but it was all without result.

Not only was it evident that the senator was not there, but it was also plain that no other room or rooms in the house had been lately occupied.

The house, beyond question, had been at some time a private sanatorium; but there was evidence that it had been a long time since any one had lived there regularly. The spies of the baron had evidently found the place and had turned it to their uses, when they wished a house wherein they could conceal their prisoners—to starve them.

Nick shuddered when he remembered that.

He had no idea of the location of the house, save that it was probably somewhere above Fort Lee, and back from the river. It was lost in the midst of a deep wood, and there seemed to be no road leading to it save one that was so overgrown with weeds as almost to have lost its semblance to a roadway.

Returning, he found that Chick and Patsy had greatly recovered, and were now rapidly regaining strength and courage, although now that thirst was satisfied, the pangs of hunger began to assert themselves.

The question arose then what to do with Mustushimi and the man who was shot through the hand.

"What shall be done with them?" asked Nick, addressing himself rather than the others. "We can't carry them, and there is no vehicle at hand; moreover, we don't know where we are."

"I suggest," said Chick, "that we leave them right here where we were. Let's lock them in that room where Patsy and I were fastened, and give them a taste of their own medicine. They probably don't need any food just now, and we can leave a pail of water within their reach. They will be safe here until we can return for them."

"There is the chance that some of their own party may return here to rescue them, and so find them and set them at liberty," suggested Patsy.

"We would have to take that chance," replied the detective. "I think that Chick's suggestion is the only one that is feasible. We can't take them with us at present; at least, I don't want to. I would rather set them at liberty, almost, than to do that. While, on the other hand, if we lock them up here, it is more than likely that we will find them here when we return."

"I can suggest an improvement even to that," said Chick.

"Well, what is it?"

"We cannot be very far from Fort Lee; don't you agree with me?"

"Yes."

"Well, in that case, we are in Jersey. The Jersey police are a little jealous. If we took these men from here now, we would have some trouble in taking them out of this State, if the prisoners chose to make a kick."

"That is true enough."

"So I suggest, Nick, that we leave them here, as I have said. We will lock them fast to the walls, as Patsy and I were locked, and we will put a pail of water where they can reach it—if we can find another pail. If we can't, we will find something else."

"Well, go on."

"Then, when we get to Fort Lee—if we ever do—we will notify the police that these men are here, and ask them to come after them. They will be only too glad to do that, and later we can apply for the proper papers to take them out of the State—if you think you want to take them."

"I was just thinking of that," replied Nick. "You re-

member, Chick, the first time I mixed up with Mustushimi, and took him before the President at the White House, the President set him free; told him to go about his business."*

"Yes."

"The second time that it happened I followed out the orders of the President, and took the scoundrel to the Japanese ambassador; again the man was, in a measure, set free. That is to say, there was no formal arrest."†

"Yes."

"It was supposed that Mustushimi had been sent back to his own country, there to be punished for what he had done here in the name of his government, but without authority."

"Well?"

"Well, the point is, Chick, that Mustushimi has somehow fooled his own ambassador. He has done that, or he has made his escape before they could send him home."

"How does all that affect us, anyway?"

"I am only wondering if the President would not rather be notified about this than to have me go ahead without consulting him? Anyhow, Chick, I will leave the Jap here for the present, as you suggested. We can come for him or send for him; I will decide that later."

Mustushimi had been listening intently to all this, as had his companion in misfortune; but neither of the men had offered to speak, or interrupt. Now, however, Mustushimi addressed himself to Nick.

"I beg, sir, that you will not leave me here," he said.

"Do you?" asked Nick. "Why?"

"I will perish if you do so."

"How perish?"

"I will starve to death, as will my companion."

"But it is my intention to return for you, or to send for you."

"You will not return," said the baron, shaking his head.

"But I tell you I will; and what I say I will do."

"You will never return; you nor your friends. If you leave me here I will perish."

"Oh, I guess not, baron. Anyhow, we can't take you with us now. It is out of the question. And you are such a slippery fellow, that it is best to serve you about as you served us, only we will leave water enough for you, and we will return or send before you are very hungry."

*See No. 562.
†See No. 563.

"You will never return, I say, and we will perish."

"Perish, then, if you prefer it that way. What makes you so sure that I will never return? What makes you so cocksure of it, eh?"

"One hundred men have sworn a solemn oath to kill you, Mr. Carter. One of them will succeed before you will have a chance to return here."

"Oh, I guess not. And, besides, there are my assistants. If I cannot return, one of them will do so for me. Patsy, you may bring the water while Chick and I fasten these men to the wall. And now, baron, if you wish me to make it as easy for you as possible, you will tell me where to find the senator."

"The senator? I do not know where he is."

"But some of your people have abducted him."

"You are mistaken. That is not true. It *is* true that we intended to do so, but when we went to the Hotel Mammoth to get him, he had already disappeared. We did not know what had become of him—until the woman you met, who thought you were he, believed that in luring you away she had succeeded in getting him."

"Mustushimi, is that true?"

"Yes."

"You do not know where he is?"

"No, I do not. I supposed until this moment that you did know yourself."

"I wish I could believe you."

"You may believe me; it is the truth I speak now."

"Then what became of him?"

"I do not know. I have no idea. I tell you that when we thought we had him all right and were about to get him away, and attack you afterward, he disappeared from under our very noses, and we did not, and do not, know what became of him. He was writing at a table in the hotel. The letter was addressed to you. One of my men saw that over his shoulder. Then suddenly he was gone. That is all I know."

CHAPTER XI.

THE BARON SEES HIS FINISH.

The detective was extremely thoughtful for several moments after that; and then he called Chick to his side.

"Take Patsy," he said, "and go outside [illegible]. Forage around the neighborhood for some food; get it, and bring some back here with you for me. I will re-

main here and question this man further. If you can find a conveyance of some kind bring it back with you, and we will take the baron away with us when we go. I will leave them both locked fast to the wall until your return."

Chick and Patsy went out, leaving Nick alone with his two prisoners, for, although the detective had not swallowed a morsel of food in many hours, he preferred to wait till the others returned, to leaving at once, now that he believed he could get some needed information out of Mustushimi.

"Baron," said Nick, as soon as they were alone together, save for the wounded man whose hand the detective had dressed so carefully, "you are somewhat of a puzzle to me. I don't know just what to do with you. If I were like you, and should elect to follow the course that would be yours were our positions reversed, I should kill you without mercy—just as I would put my heel on the head of a venomous serpent in the grass. Do you understand that?"

"Yes," replied the baron, quite frankly. "My only wonder is that you do not do so. I have tried to kill you many times. I intended to do so to-day."

"You did?"

"Yes. It was my intention to talk with you as long as I cared to do so, and then to shoot you all dead, one after another. That is why I brought the pistol with me."

"You're a pleasant sort of a scoundrel, aren't you?"

"I tell you this," said the baron, shrugging his shoulders, "because I realize that I need expect no mercy from you now, and you may as well know the truth."

"I am glad that you view it in that way."

"It was not my intention to starve you to death. No; not that. I intended first to give you each a little water, and then a little more, and then when I had had fun enough with you, I was going to shoot you."

"Humph! And the senator?"

"I assure you, Mr. Carter, that I know nothing whatever about the senator."

"I wish I could believe you."

"I am speaking the truth."

"Then what in the world could have become of him?"

"I have thought, until I found you here, that you had spirited him away somewhere, knowing in your own mysterious way of the plot against you both."

"By the way, what was that plot? You had best tell me all about it."

"It was my own declaration of war against you, sir. Twice, notwithstanding the excellence with which I have completed my organization of spies in this country, you have overcome me. The first time you made it extremely unpleasant for me; the second time you broke up my organization entirely, and both times you captured me."

"Well?"

"The last time you delivered me, by the orders of your sublime ruler, the President, to the ambassador of my own country."

"And he was supposed to return you to Japan, to be punished for your misdeeds."

"He did intend to do so, but I escaped him, and now he believes that I am dead. I caused it to come to his knowledge that I had killed myself rather than return to Japan disgraced."

"And he believes it?"

"He does."

"Go on, then, with your story about that plot."

"I saw, when I decided to reorganize, that it would be utterly useless to do so unless you, Mr. Carter, could be gotten rid of. Obviously the only way to do that was to take your life, and I decided that it should be done.

"I got together one hundred of my men from different cities, and swore them all to seek you and kill you. Then, as we were about to begin operations upon you, we were advised that the senator, whom I have cause to hate, and almost as much cause to fear as I fear you, was coming to New York.

"In Washington I would not care to attack him to take his life, but in New York I thought it would be different, and so I laid my plans to get rid of him also.

"We knew that he had communicated with the firm of Studley & Hall, in Broadway, that he was coming to the city, and the day he actually started we telegraphed to that firm that his going from Washington would be delayed. You see we did not wish them to know the exact time of his arrival in New York—at least, until later. We feared that one of them might look him up at his hotel, and so interfere with our plans."

"You look far ahead of you, baron."

"In my business it is necessary."

"I can well believe that."

"As it was, the senator left Washington many hours before I supposed he would do so, and, therefore, when he arrived in New York, we were not ready to receive him."

"You knew what hotel he would go to, I suppose?"

"Yes. It was only by accident that I learned of his arrival, however. One of my men who knew him was waiting there, and saw him enter. He afterward saw the senator at the desk, writing a letter, addressed to you. Then my man went to the telephone to notify me, and it was while he was attending to that matter that the senator disappeared."

"I am beginning to believe you, baron."

"I am telling you only the truth, Mr. Carter. I have nothing to conceal from you now. I am ostracized and disgraced. I have failed the third time with you, and that means death for me. If I returned to my own country now I should be thrown into prison, and then executed. If I were free, and chose to remain here, my own countrymen would ignore me, and in my own great spy system, that I have taken so much trouble to create, I could find nobody among my own kind to serve me. I am through, Mr. Carter. If you should set me free now, and turn me loose, I would not go a hundred yards before I took my own life. Believe it or not, as you choose."

"Do you mean that you would even abandon your evil designs against me?" asked Nick.

"I have already abandoned them. I have no more designs against you. What would be the good of them? Your death now would not avail me anything. I am through; as much through with all that concerns this life as if I were already dead. The only privilege I would ask, if it were given to me to ask any, would be to select the manner of my death."

"Tell me more about the senator, baron."

"I know no more about him to tell you."

"Where do you suppose he could have gone?"

"I am as ignorant as you are about that, sir."

"Possibly one of your men might have attacked him, knowing that it would please you to have him do so."

"No; that was not done. The senator was seated at that desk, writing. My spy left him for a moment to go to the telephone, believing that he had ample time to do so and return before the senator would have finished. He returned, and the senator was gone, and from that moment we have seen nothing of him, or heard nothing of him—save when Madam Faxton believed that she had found him, in you."

"By the way, what about that same Madam Faxton?"

"There is nothing about her, save that she is one of my spies; I should say, *was* one of the corps. She is the wife of my former second in command, the man whom you knew as Dumont."

"I see. A nice pair they are."

"They are expert spies. They have long been in the service of the French Government, but owing to some irregularity were obliged to leave the country. They applied to me, and I engaged them. Madam Dumont prefers to be known as Madam Faxton."

"But how did she know enough to represent herself as one of the senator's old acquaintances?"

"In my system we knew many things. The senator's letters, which we abstracted from his desk long enough to copy, gave us the necessary information. I might add, for it will please you, that yours are the only papers I have ever sought which I have been unable to obtain, Mr. Carter. There are no servants in your house who can be bribed."

"Baron, did you try that?"

"I did not try it; no. I felt around for a while and discovered that it was useless."

"So you haven't succeeded in reading my letters, eh?"

"No."

"Well, baron, if you had gotten them you wouldn't have found anything. I don't keep letters, save those that are necessary for business papers. Who is this man here, with the wounded hand?"

"He is one of my new men. I know very little about him."

"He looks to me like a Chinaman, dressed up as a Jap," said Nick, after viewing the man carefully again.

"He is."

"When did he enter your service?"

"Yesterday; and he has done nothing to incur your displeasure, save what he was trying to do when you shot him through the hand."

"Very good. Then, presently, I will release him, and let him go back to China, if he will."

"I think he will be glad to do that."

"Now, baron, I will test your reformation——"

"I have not reformed, sir. I am not sorry for anything I have done—save that I have failed. I have not reformed; I have finished."

"Very well, I will test that, then. Where do you meet your men?"

"We have no regular place of meeting. I send word to them through the lieutenants. I need not tell you who

they are, and I will not. With me, the organization dies. I will not betray individuals, and, besides, there is nothing for which you could arrest them now, save the two who tried to kill you a few days ago."

"You mean by first tampering with my car, and then by attempting to drop a rock on me?"

"Yes."

"Both those things were done by your men?"

"Yes. I will not tell you who they are, and you will never be able to find them. And, besides, it would do you no good, for neither of them will make a second attempt."

"Who affixed that pistol arrangement to my door, which nearly killed me?"

"I did that myself. There was a chance that it might get you."

"Now, about this house. Do your men know of its existence?"

"Yes. It was to be my personal headquarters. Madam Faxton knew about it. It was she who suggested it."

"Baron, I have a fancy to see that woman again. Where could I find her?"

"She is staying at the Mastodon. She is to come to this house this afternoon at three."

"And others with her?"

"Yes; her husband."

"The man Dumont?"

"The same."

"I think, baron, that in that case I will wait for them."

"I don't think," said the baron slowly, "that you will have to wait. If——"

"Why not?"

"If you will turn your head and look behind you, I think you will discover that madam is already here."

CHAPTER XII.

THE APPARITION IN THE DOORWAY.

It can be imagined with what suddenness Nick Carter did turn his head then, for he had not heard a sound, nor supposed that they were not alone in the house. And what he discovered was sufficiently startling.

The beautiful Madam Faxton was standing in the doorway, smiling placidly upon the scene that confronted her, and she was holding a pistol extended in her right hand—holding it so that it effectually "covered" the detective; and Nick knew from her attitude, and because of the air of assurance with which she held the weapon, that it was not only loaded, but that the woman was perfectly capable of using it with deadly effect.

Directly behind her, as she stepped a pace through the doorway, came her husband, the man who is known to us as Dumont—and he was also smiling, as if well pleased by the discovery they had made, and by the evident mastery they had of the situation.

Both paused when they were just inside the door, and stood almost side by side. The woman was the first to speak.

"I have been listening long enough to know who you are, sir," she said coldly. "I have never knowingly seen Nick Carter before—but I have heard of you. What will you give for permission to live, Mr. Carter?"

She was perfectly cool and self-possessed. There was not a tremor, or the suggestion of one, in her voice or manner, and Nick realized that his life hung by a more slender thread, at that moment, than it had at any time while he was suffering with thirst in that same room, while he was a prisoner there. He replied in something of the same tone she had used.

"Two hours ago I would not have given a fig for it," he retorted.

"I am referring to the present, not to the past," she said coldly. "What will you give for permission to live longer?"

"Is my life, then, in danger, madam?"

"It is in danger so imminent that if you make one more facetious answer I shall deprive you of it."

"What do you want for it, then, since we are bargaining?" he asked.

"Immunity for all of us—save that toad there"—and she pointed with the other hand toward the baron. "You may have him. I have heard enough to know that he would have betrayed me, and my husband, as well, to you. I have been told, Mr. Carter, that you are a man of your word. That once you make a promise you keep it, no matter what the consequences may be. I am willing to believe that it is so."

"It is true."

"Then if you will promise me that Dumont and I may go away unmolested you are safe from me; and if you do not make the promise at once I will shoot."

She and Dumont were standing with their backs toward the doorway; but Nick was facing it, and as she

uttered her threat, the detective saw his two assistants, Chick and Patsy, as they suddenly made their appearance behind her. It was evident to Nick at once that they had seen madam and her husband enter the house, and had crept forward stealthily, had followed them up the stairs, and had, therefore, arrived in time.

"Will you give me a moment to think?" he asked her, and she replied:

"While I count five. No more."

"That will be sufficient, thank you."

In fact, there had already been sufficient time, for at that instant Chick, who was nearest to the woman, suddenly reached around her, and seized the wrist of the hand that held the weapon, while Patsy at the same time threw himself upon Dumont.

Madam pulled the trigger, of course, but the bullet embedded itself in the ceiling instead of in the body of the detective, and Madam Faxton found herself held so that she could not even struggle, while her husband was thrown to the floor and had a pair of handcuffs snapped upon him instantly.

"Take her weapons away and release her," said Nick, to his first assistant. "Madam, will you be seated?"

"Thank you. It is as well to remain standing," she replied coolly; for now that she had been overcome she made the jest of it in a manner that was surprising.

"You drive a hard bargain, madam," said the detective.

"It seemed necessary at the moment," she retorted. "The opportunity is your own, now."

"So I perceive. I know of no crime that you have committed, madam, save that one of administering the drug to me through the medium of a cigarette—and that was so ably done that I could hardly hold you for that. I think that if you will consent to leave the country at once I will not care to hold you here."

"I will do that, of course. I am not accustomed to your laws, Mr. Carter. I supposed that you could imprison me indefinitely for what I have already done to you. I abducted you, did I not?"

"But you thought you were taking away the senator, didn't you?"

"Yes. When I found that I was mistaken——"

"When did you find that out?"

"This morning. That is why I am here so much earlier than I was expected."

"Do you mean that you know now where the senator is?" demanded the detective, interrupting her.

"I do."

"Where is he?"

"In his own room, at the hotel."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Positive."

"How do you know it?"

"I saw him when he was brought in."

"*Brought* in?"

"Yes. The disappearance of the senator was what you would call a fiasco. It was an accident. He stepped outside the hotel for a moment, after writing a letter, and was knocked down and rendered insensible, a block away from the hotel, by an automobile; and the people who injured him gathered him up and rushed with him to a hospital, where he was cared for. He had changed his clothes, and, unfortunately, had nothing about him by which he could be identified, so it was not until he thoroughly recovered consciousness that they were able to ascertain who he was. He is now at the hotel, in his room, and is not severely injured. No bones were broken. He expects to be fully recovered before a week passes. I obtained all this information about him at the hotel desk."

"Thank you. It is so valuable that I think I may promise you that you may go—if you will consent that one of my men shall see you safely aboard a vessel, bound for any other country than this one you may select."

"And what about my husband?"

"Dumont? He promised once before to leave, and did not keep his word. I am afraid——"

"I will keep the promise this time, Mr. Carter," Dumont interrupted him.

"There is one more condition."

"What is that?" asked the woman, who seemed the brains of the party—that is, her part of the affair.

The detective turned and pointed toward Mustushimi.

"This man," he said slowly, "has committed so many crimes that he should be executed forthwith; but there are reasons of state which render it imperative that he should be gotten rid of without noise. It is best that the affair of his spy system should not be noised abroad among the public. Japan is sufficiently worked up, as it is, and the jingo party that the baron represents, which is not at all his government, would only make political capital out of his arrest, trial, and conviction. It is better that it should be avoided. If you and Dumont will consent to take him with you and see that he sails on the

ship with you, I will leave you all here together, and take my chances on your keeping your word."

"I will keep my word—if I give it—Mr. Carter. I am as particular about that as you are, sir," said the woman.

"I am glad to hear that. Is it agreed?"

"Yes."

"Speak, Dumont."

"I agree."

"And you, baron?"

"I am content, Mr. Carter."

"Patsy, relieve Dumont of any weapon he may have, and set him free."

"What about this other prisoner, Mr. Carter?" asked the woman, pointing toward the wounded Chinaman.

"You may do with him as you please. He will be glad enough to go with you, I imagine."

Madam Faxton took a step nearer to the detective, and, looking squarely into his eyes, she said slowly:

"I owe you a debt, Mr. Carter. I shall not forget it. You have done me a kindness to-day. I do not forget such things. Some day we shall meet again, and you will be glad that I am a friend, instead of an enemy. I am something of a prophet, as you will one day know."

* * * * * * *

There were two circumstances which closely followed upon this scene which require some reference. The first one was the meeting between the senator and Nick Carter, when the latter went to the hotel to call upon the statesman that same evening, after his return to New York.

The senator had some bruises and contusions, but was not seriously hurt, although he was unable to leave his room.

"It was this way, Carter," he explained. "I knew that I was being dogged all the time by somebody, and once I fancied that I saw Mustushimi, himself, on the street. So I put two and two together, and made up my mind that the spy system had been completely reorganized, and that you should know about it without delay. Besides, I had been twice almost killed, and I believed that the spies were doing it—attempting my life because of what I knew about them. That was the grave business matter I wished to discuss with you."

"But what about that accident?" asked Nick. "Wasn't that a part of their plots?"

"I don't think so. I wrote the letter, and posted it in the hotel, to you. But I had no sooner dropped it in the box than I changed my mind and determined to call upon you that evening, instead of waiting for you to receive my letter. I left the hotel at once to do so. I walked down Fifth Avenue a block or two, and was crossing it when I was hit by a motor-car, and thrown into the gutter. I didn't know a thing about it until the next day, or the day after that. Anyhow, that is all there was to that."

"You look as if it were quite enough."

"It was, thank you. Now, tell me about Mustushimi."

As if in reply to the question, and before Nick could answer it, there came a tap at the senator's door, and in response to a "Come in!" Chick entered the room.

"I thought you would like to hear the news at once, Nick," he said, after greeting the senator, and expressing his regrets about the accident.

"The news?" replied Nick inquiringly.

"Yes. It is about our friend, the baron."

"What about him?"

"He is dead."

"Eh? Did Madam Faxton or her husband kill him, Chick?"

"No. He killed himself. I took all three of them to a down-town hotel, you know, as you directed me to do. Then I secured passage for them on a steamer for Gibraltar to-morrow. I returned to the hotel and informed Dumont and his wife about it, and then sent to the baron's room for him. He did not respond to the rapping against the door, and, to make a long story short, when we entered we found him there—dead."

"He had killed himself?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"By taking some kind of quick poison. Anyhow, he is dead, and his body is now in the hands of an undertaker. It seems that he meant what he said, when he told you that he had not reformed, but had finished. He meant it."

"So it seems."

"Anyhow," said the senator, "he will not trouble us again."

"Evidently not," said the detective.

THE END.

The next number (565) of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY will contain "Secrets of a Haunted House; or, Nick Carter's Fight with Ghosts."

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TALKS WITH OUR READERS.

The Uganda Railway has always impressed us as being one which, to do it full justice, should be dealt with in comic opera. Named after a colony through which it does not run, starting from a terminus carefully placed as far away as possible from the port it serves, though reaching the island on which that port is situated by a bridge built at great expense, running for a long extent through natural game preserves, with the result that its trains are held up from time to time by objecting animals, every mile on the line has a more or less humorous tale attached to it.

In the early days, while construction was still proceeding, and while only a part of the line was open for traffic—in fact, until quite recently, life on the line must always have been interesting and occasionally very exciting. In August, 1905, for instance, the traffic manager at Mombasa received from the Babu station-master at Simba the following telegram, marked urgent: "Lion is on the platform. Please instruct guard and driver to proceed carefully and without signal in yard. Guard to advise passengers not to get out here, and be careful when coming into booking-office."

The touching piece of advice included seems somewhat superfluous. However, one bold sportsman did get out, and ascending a convenient tree, managed to "get" a lioness and a lion within a few minutes. He further wounded another lion, the one waiting on the platform. However, the latter, after being wounded, disappeared, and could not be found, so the sportsman went along the siding to look for him. He found him—suddenly—but owing to his swiftness in getting in a blow from the shoulder on the lion's jaw after an exciting rough-and-tumble, he found himself on top when the lion bolted into the bush.

A little later in the day the traffic manager received a further wire from the station-master, who appeared to be somewhat recovering confidence, as it was not marked urgent: "One African injured again by a lion. Please send cartridges by next train, certain." The same afternoon this was followed by a second touching telegram: "Pointsman is surrounded by two lions while returning from distant signal, and then pointsman went on top of telegraph-post, near water-tanks. Train to stop there, and take him on train, and then proceed. Please arrange necessary steps."

It is not "big game," alone, however, that causes annoyance, for from a station close to Nairobi about five years ago the following report was received: "Rats running about, eating holes in the ceiling, and biting off pointsman's toes. Send rat-traps."

Thomas A. Edison is quoted in an interview as predicting that before long science will enable the farmer to enrich his lands by means of nitrogen from the air. He said:

"Until recently the utilization of atmospheric nitrogen was regarded as merely a laboratory demonstration. Business men said it would never be obtained cheaply enough to sell to the farmer as a fertilizer. In Norway a plant has been established which has been conducted with such good results that I expect to see atmospheric fertilizer on the market in this country within the next ten years.

"That such a product will soon be imperatively necessary there is no doubt. Every shipload of wheat and corn which goes abroad leaves the United States so much poorer, not in gold, but in nitrogen. Another scientific discovery which I expect to see before I die is in the direct generation of electricity from coal. This has already been achieved in an experimental way. I have heard of several men who have done it. Imagine what will be the consequences. At present nine-tenths of the power obtained from coal is lost by the use of boilers, wheels, and dynamos. With the direct generation of the electrical current, therefore, the world will have ten times more energy than now."

Aside from those interested in taking up public lands, there is a strong sentiment in favor of supporting the President and saving our forests. Unless something is done in this matter, we shall soon see the end of our lumber resources, with the very worst results not only to the many industries which depend mainly upon wood as their chief material, but upon climate and productiveness as well.

Never before has there been such wanton waste of timber as we of America are guilty of to-day. We are cutting down three times as much as we are growing, using six times as much wood per capita as is used in Europe. After the Eastern and Western States had wasted their valuable forest wealth, it was thought that the South, which had the bulk of the remaining merchantable lumber, would be more careful and sparing; but experience seems to go for nothing in this matter, and the South is to-day cutting down its pine, oak, and cypress as rapidly as Michigan did. In the twenty-six years up to 1907 the fourteen Southern States produced 235,147,000,000 feet of lumber, or nearly one-third of the total. To-day the South has reached its maximum of production, and if it continues at its present figure it will soon be as treeless as portions of the East.

At present about one-fifth of the total forest area is still embraced in national forests, the other four-fifths have already passed into private hands. The question is now as to the preservation of these lands and the extension of federal

and State ownership and control so as to save such of our forests as remain. Public sentiment is unquestionably with the President in this matter.

Fish-hatcheries, public and private, all over the country, were this spring about a month behind in their output, this being one of the innumerable effects due to the season's unusually cold weather.

The hatching-period of fish eggs depends largely on the temperature of the water in which they are placed, the colder the water the longer the time required; and with the temperature of the water kept down by the continued coldness of the weather fish-hatching has everywhere been correspondingly delayed.

The continued coldness of the water this season has had retarding effect at the Aquarium. Here it is necessary in summer artificially to cool the water supplied for the tanks containing the trout, salmon, and whitefish. These fishes would in nature, as summer advanced, seek cool depths of water and the cold water adjacent to spring-holes; they could not be kept alive in aquarium tanks in water of the temperature at which, in summer, it flows from the city mains.

So here there is installed a refrigerating plant for the artificial cooling of the water when its natural temperature becomes too high, which is anything over 60. By means of the cooling apparatus the water in these tanks is kept, through the summer, at a temperature of between 54 and 58, and so until, with the fall, the natural temperature of the water has gone down again to 60 or under.

Usually this refrigerating plant is started in May, for usually by the middle of that month, or not much later, the water has come to be so warm that its use is needed.

In 1904, for instance, it was started on May 16; in 1905, on May 25, and, in 1906, on May 23. In the present year, with its backward spring and continuingly cold water in the streams, the Aquarium refrigerating plant was not started up until June 14.

Color agriculture is the latest. Camille Flammarion put seedlings of the sensitive plant into four different houses—an ordinary conservatory, a blue house, an ordinary greenhouse, a red house.

After a few months' waiting, he found the little plants in the blue house practically just as he had put them in. They seemingly had fallen asleep and remained unchanged. In the green-glass house they had grown more than in the ordinary glass house, but they were weedy and poor. In the red house the seedlings had become positive giants, well nourished and well developed, fifteen times as big as the normal plants. In the red light the plants had become hypersensitive. It was found that the blue light retards the process of decay as well as those of growth.

Perhaps the most extraordinary development is that of forcing plants by the use of anesthetics. It was the discovery of Doctor Johannesen, of Copenhagen. The plants are put into a box into which ether is evaporated. The heavy vapor descends and envelops the plants. After forty-eight hours the plants are taken out and placed in a coolhouse. The buds and plants at once begin to sprout far more rapidly than those plants that have not been treated with anesthetic. Chloroform also can be used.

Doctor Johannesen suggests that we here come on the question of repose in plants. In France, by setting up a sort of lightning conductor in the center of a field and connecting it with a network of wires running through the soil of the field, an increase of 50 per cent. was secured in a potato crop. The electricity was drawn from the atmosphere.

The result of the recent target-practise shows a notable increase in the general efficiency of American naval gunners.

The scores which have just been announced indicate that this year there are ten star ships—those whose final merit is at least 85 per cent. of that of the trophy winner of their class—whereas last year there were only three.

Last year the average final merit of all ships was 64 per cent. of the highest final merit, while this year it is 71 per cent.

Another remarkable fact in connection with the result is that the efficiency of the Pacific squadron, which was the smallest in final merit last year, is this year the highest of all the squadrons.

The ships which compose the second squadron of the Pacific fleet, and were last year the Pacific squadron, under command of Rear Admiral Swinburne, won all that they could win—that is, the cruiser, gunboat, and torpedo-boat trophies.

The battle-ship trophy, of course, went to the Atlantic fleet, as there is no battle-ship in the second squadron of the Pacific fleet. The final merit of Admiral Swinburne's squadron is 20 per cent. higher than that of the next highest squadron.

As an illustration of the old saying that "doctors will differ," the following is related by a physician of unquestioned veracity: In the course of a lecture which he was delivering before a number of students, he had brought in by the mother a child six months old, which, he stated, was suffering from a very peculiar affection—one seldom seen in this country—and he requested five of the students present each separately to diagnose the case.

The first gave it as his medical belief that the child was suffering from incipient pneumonia; the second, after examination, pronounced it incipient diphtheria; the third staked his reputation upon its being peritonitis; the fourth called it marasmus, while the fifth said it was "malaria." When they had each made a careful examination, the lecturer said:

"Well, gentlemen, have you anything further to say in regard to the case?"

"Nothing more than has been already said," was the reply from each.

"Well," said he, taking the little one and holding it up before them, "this is a child that has never had a day's illness since its birth. It is the most perfectly healthy child that I have ever seen."

Along the river-banks and in the lowlands of South America there is found a medium-sized rodent which in many respects resembles our North American beaver. This

animal is known as the coypu, and its fur is spoken of in the fur and hat trades as nutria. Its chief difference from the beaver is in the tail, which more nearly resembles that of the otter. A fully grown coypu is about thirty-five inches in length, including the tail, and the length of the body alone is from eighteen to twenty-two inches.

The fur of the coypu is short and silky, and much resembles beaver fur, while the overhairs are stiff and of a yellowish-brown in color, varying from one to three inches in length. Nutria first came into use about the year 1810, being used as an imitation of beaver in the making of hats. Later on, the best skins were brought into use by furriers, who worked it up in imitation of beaver, otter, and seal, for which purposes it is still used.

The skins suitable for furriers' use are sold by the skin, while those which are good only for hatters' furs are sold by the pound. Present prices for skins suitable for furriers' use are 60 cents to $1.20 per skin; prices for skins for cutting—hatters' furs—36 cents to 44 cents per pound. It is said that about 75 per cent. of the total catch of this fur is used in the United States and about 30 per cent. of the catch is used in hat-making.

The coypu is hunted and trapped from May until October by Indians and Gauchos, who catch large numbers of the animals. After skinning, the pelts are dried in the open air, and in this condition are sold to local dealers in the trapping-districts. Collectors travel through the country once a year and buy up these lots of skins, which they ship to New York, London, and Hamburg.

To escape the tariff, which doubles the cost of their goods, the famous cigarette manufacturers of Cairo, the famous tailors of London, the famous lens-makers of Germany, the famous automobile-builders of France—and so on indefinitely—have taken to opening factories in America, and now sell their goods here at a reasonable price.

A BATTLE WITH A WINDMILL.

BY FRANK H. COLBURN.

One day I found myself stranded in Fresno, California, and applied for work in a vineyard owned by a Mr. Eller. I had been there a week when one day the big windmill, which supplied the whole winery with water, got out of order and refused to pump. Mr. Eller examined it carefully, but was unable to learn where the difficulty lay. He came down from the tank, much disturbed, for water was a great necessity in that dry country.

"I wish you would try what you can do in the way of fixing that windmill," Mr. Eller said.

I promised that I would, and Mr. Eller left me.

After supper that evening I secured a hammer and chisel and started for the windmill. I had need to make haste if I expected to accomplish anything, for the days were shortening, and already darkness was falling.

The windmill stood some two or three hundred yards from the house directly behind the wine-cellar. It was about seventy-five feet high—from the base to the top of the wheel—but in that deceptive twilight, it looked like some giant finger reaching to the sky.

I stuck my tools in my coat pocket, and began to climb the long ladder which stretched to the top of the tank. From thence it would be easy to reach and manipulate the wheel.

I made the ascent in safety, and after a little stood on top of the rough boards with which the tank was covered. For some time I stood, admiring the splendid view I could obtain on every side, and wondering at the extent of country that came under my gaze, until warned by the ever-increasing gloom that I was out on business, not pleasure.

I forgot just what was the matter with the wheel. Some simple disarrangement of the machinery which took me but little time to ascertain and less to remedy. Feeling certain that the mill would now perform its duty as well as before, I turned to retrace my way. In doing so I stepped upon a half-concealed trap-door, intended to be used as a means of ingress into the tank in case of repairs being needed. This door was old and rotten; its hinges were broken, and it rested very insecurely upon its foundation. Consequently it was unable to retain my weight, and tilted suddenly. I fell with a prodigious splash into the water beneath.

There were about two feet of water in the tank. I gurgled and sputtered and struggled as though there were twenty. However, I quickly regained my feet, dipping and shivering, and very much confused from my sudden immersion, but uninjured. I was a prisoner, however.

The tank was about ten feet in height. The sides were perfectly smooth, and afforded no foothold. There was no ladder or other means by which I could clamber out. I vowed that if ever I built a tank I would provide in some way for such an emergency as the present.

About three and a half feet above my head was the supply pipe. It extended a little ways into the tank. If I could only manage to reach that I might possibly pull myself up and escape. I knew perfectly well I could not reach it, but hope, like love, is blind to all obstacles, and I jumped desperately for it. I failed, of course. I didn't come within a foot of it. However, after I had continued my effort for some time, I began to feel a comfortable warmth creep over that portion of my body which was above water. Therefore, in lieu of anything better to do, I kept on jumping.

By and by my teeth stopped chattering—somewhat—and I stopped leaping altogether.

"Here's a pretty mess," I said to myself. "I wonder how long I'm to be penned up in this place. Goodness knows my legs are tired enough already without having to stand on them all night: and I can't very well sit down in two feet of water."

It suddenly occurred to me that I possessed a voice of tolerable strength and clearness, and that I might make good use of it upon the present occasion. Accordingly I gave utterance to a few of the most startling shouts that probably ever assailed the ears of a mortal. But they were unsuccessful so far as escape was concerned.

After I had shouted myself hoarse, I waited with patience for the arrival of a relief party. At the end of five minutes it hadn't come; at the end of half an hour I didn't believe it would come.

"Surely," I thought, "they must have heard those war-whoops at the house. At any rate, it's about time Eller started out to hunt me up. He certainly don't think it's going to take me forever to fix his plaguey windmill."

I was becoming worried. The prospect of having to remain cooped up in my present narrow quarters all night was by no means pleasant. The expectation of having to stand for the next ten hours in two feet of cold water was not pleasing to a person of my tastes. It might have done for one of those old-time monks, who were always imposing penances upon themselves for sins committed, but it was not suited to my constitution. Most cheerfully would I have resigned my position to any one expressing a wish for it.

It was now pitch-dark in the tank. The only light I obtained was the feeble glow of the stars shining through the trap-door. I stood under this, gazing up wistfully into the heavens, so high above me. After a time my eyes grew heavy, my head fell forward onto my breast, and, strange as it may appear, I dropped off into a gentle doze. I was awakened by a slight breeze fanning my cheek.

I opened my eyes dreamily. Overhead I could hear a deep, rumbling, grating sound; something going up and down, up and down, as it were, a monstrous churn in motion.

"What can that be?" was my ejaculation. I was not left long in suspense. A perfect deluge of the coldest kind of water came pouring down over me, drenching me to the skin; giving me, in fact, a regular shower-bath.

The stream continued without abatement, and I soon recovered sufficiently from my momentary astonishment and confusion to move out of the way. No one should say that I did not know enough to come in when it rained.

As yet I was hardly awake. I stood to one side, getting splashed, and stupidly staring at the supply-pipe, which was belching forth water. Then the solution of the problem flashed through my brain. The windmill was pumping.

I was too startled at first to realize my peril. But gradually it dawned upon me that the water was rising fast, and that if I did not escape, or relief did not come, in the course of a few hours, I would be drowned like a rat in a trap.

I thrust my hand into my trousers pocket and pulled out my knife. The large blade was open in a second, and I was at work with all my might trying to dig a hole through the side of the tank. I quickly saw that my task was hopeless. The wood was soft, but the planks were very thick, and it would be hours before I could produce the smallest opening.

I must have something to occupy my attention, else I would go wild. So I dug on till I broke my blade off short.

I dropped the useless knife into the water. It sunk with a dull splash. I stood feeling the water slowly creep its way upward. I calculated that I had about an hour and a half of life left to me.

The water reached my waist. I threw myself against the walls of my prison, shouting for help. But none came. The sound of my voice echoed again and again into my own ears—it reached no others. I thought the reverberations would never cease. It seemed to me as though the whole world must have heard that despairing cry.

I listened—every nerve strained to catch some echoing shout. But the only sound that broke the stillness, was the steady incessant splash, splash, splash of falling water; and the heavy noise of that great pump working overhead. I called and listened again. Still no answer.

My past life came up before me like a dream. I could see my mother—my good mother—as plainly with my mind's eye, as I had ever seen her with the flush of life upon her cheek. I remembered the long confidential talks we had together, and the many times she told me to be good, and true, and noble, and that was all that she would ever ask. Then I recalled many of the things I had said to her, and, strange to tell, there dwelt in my recollection not the kisses I had given nor the love I had bestowed upon her; I could call back only my unkind, cruel remarks, and the heartbreaks I had caused her; I thought what a wretch I had been, and did not believe that we could ever meet in Heaven.

The water was up to my shoulders now, but I hardly noticed it.

My thoughts turned upon my father—recently deceased.

The water was up to my neck. Ugh! how icy-cold it was—right from the bowels of the earth. It seemed to freeze my blood. Ah, how stealthily it crept up, little by little, inch by inch! It knew it had a victim in its grasp, and had no fear of being cheated of its prey. In another moment it would be at my mouth; another instant and it would be all that I could do to breathe on tiptoe; another short minute and—I turned and furiously beat again upon my prison wall, with both my fists. What madness! my eyes were almost starting from their sockets; I imagined that they had the strange, hunted look of a poor rat when cornered. I could understand the feelings of the little creature now.

My hands fell nerveless to my side. They struck upon something hard in either pocket of my coat. I thrust them in—almost unconsciously, and drew forth—the hammer and the chisel.

I uttered a cry of delight, and began to chisel away for dear life under water. In no time I had hacked out two rude steps. I formed another just above the surface of the water, another still higher, and another as high as I could reach.

The water was to my nose. I dropped my tools, and by the aid of nail and hand and foot managed to draw myself up, step by step, until I could grasp the edge of the trap-door. Thus much accomplished, it was an easy matter to lift myself out. I fell panting, and trembling in every nerve, upon the rough board covering of the tank.

* * * * * * *

Mr. Eller had not heard my shouts, for the simple reason that he had been called by business into Fresno. The men slept in a house too far distant from the windmill for my cries to reach. Thus it was that I had been allowed nearly to yell my voice away, without attracting attention.

I had had a pretty good scare, it must be confessed; so good, indeed, that I have forever ceased to emulate Don Quixote in any more adventures with a windmill.

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